DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 590 UD 027 468

AUTHOR Vazquez, Blanca, Ed.
TITLE Puerto Rican Women as Workers and Writers.
INSTITUTION City Univ. of New York, N.Y. Centro de Estudios Puertorriguenos.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 124p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Historical Materials (060) -- Multilingual/Bilingual Materials (171)
LANGUAGE English; Spanish
JOURNAL CIT Centro de Estudios Puertoriquenos Bulletin; v2 n7 Win 1989-1990

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Authors; Dominicans; *Employed Women; Females; *Feminism; Hispanic Americans; Interviews; *Life Style; Literature Reviews; Modern History; *Puerto Ricans
IDENTIFIERS *Latinas

ABSTRACT

This theme issue of the "Centro Bulletin" highlights recent studies by and about employed Puerto Rican and Latina women. "La mujer en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX" (O. Jimenez de Wagenheim), in Spanish, reviews the contributions of women to Puerto Rican economic, political, and social life during the nineteenth century. "Notas sobre el desarrollo de la industria del tobaco en Puerto Rico y su impacto en la mujer puertorriquena, 1898-1920" (A. Tirado Aviles), in Spanish, and "Women's Labor and the Domestic Unit: Industrial Homework in Puerto Rico during the 1930s" (M. del Carmen Baerga) focus on the history of women in the tobacco and needlework industries in Puerto Rico and examine the effects of gender and class on the incorporation of women into production. "The Lives of 'Pioneras': Bibliographic and Research Sources on Puerto Rican Women in the United States" (A. Ortiz) concentrates on migration experiences and the contributions of Puerto Rican women to the early New York community. "Growing Up Puertorriquena: The Feminist Bildungsroman and the Novels of Nicholasa Mohr and Magali Garcia Ramis" (M. Fernandez Olmos) focuses on the psychological development of the female protagonists in educational novels. "Entra dominicanos: Una lectura de 'Las cuatro ninas'" (D. Cocco de Filippis) reviews the work of Dominican author Julia Alvarez. The "Portfolio" section highlights female Puerto Rican visual artists living and working in New York. "Ellos/Ellas y Nosotras: Breve paseo por las autopistas y callejones sociales" (C. Romany) applies feminist theory to the everyday lives of Puerto Rican women. Interviews with Antonia Pantoja and Esperanza Martell examine the role of Puerto Rican women in political organizations in New York from the 1940s through the 1970s. (FMW)

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CENTRO

DE ESTUDIOS PUERTORRIQUEÑOS BULLETIN WINTER 1989-1990

Puerto Rican Women As Workers and Writers

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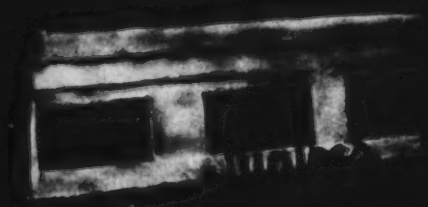

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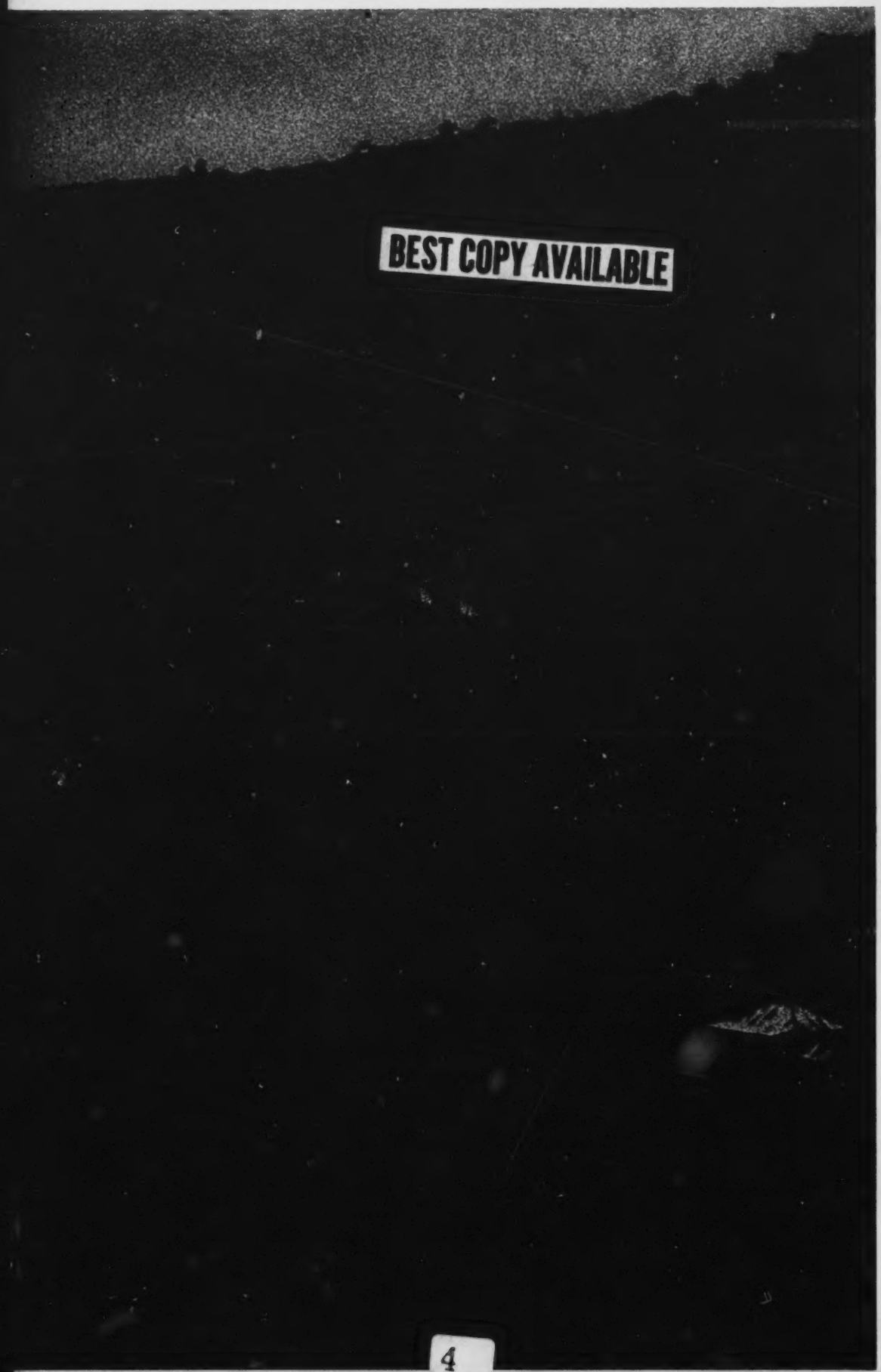
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Our special thanks to Joseph S. Murphy, Chancellor of the City University of New York, Jay Hershenson, Vice Chancellor for University Relations, and Ernesto Malavé, Assistant Director for Governmental Relations for their generous support in the production of the **Centro Bulletin.**

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BROOKLYN, Panel VI, 1989
Chalk pastel on paper
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Inside Cover
Photograph/Jack Delano

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CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS PUERTORRIQUEÑOS
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CENTRO

Vol. II, No. 7

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EDITORIAL*EDITORIAL*

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In the last twenty years there has appeared a growing body of literature on women's issues. These writings have been instrumental in deepening our understanding of the nature and extent of women's participation in all spheres of social reality. This issue of the **Centro Bulletin** is dedicated to highlighting recent work primarily by and about Puerto Rican and Latina women.

Until very recently the field of history has been almost the exclusive domain of a traditional male elite. It is only with the burgeoning labor and women's movement that we began to see a call for a "History from Below" or a "People's History". The emergent Third World following World War II also added its voice to the chorus, demanding that the contribution of the colonized be included. These efforts have led to a re-mapping of a previously Eurocentric and patriarchal historiography.

The term "People's History" has now had a long career, and covers a variety of different writings and subject matter. The effort, however, is always to make the experience of the masses of ordinary people surface. In some cases the focus is on culture and psychology, in others on social movements, in yet others on family and private life. Propelled by the women's movement, the new historiography takes women into account as workers, as militants and participants in struggle, and as part of capitalist society.

In this issue, the articles by **Amílcar Tirado Avilés** and **María del Carmen Baerga** focus on the history of women in the tobacco and needlework industries in Puerto Rico, with a special interest in the relationship between production outside the home and the reproduction of household and family. The incorporation of women into production, both writers conclude, is conditioned by gender as well as class.

The contributions of women to the economic, political and social life of Puerto Rico during the 19th century is the subject of **Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim's** article. **Altagracia Ortiz**, in turn, concentrates on the migration experience of Puerto Rican women. In her bibliographic essay, she highlights the contributions of Puerto Rican women to the political, intellectual and cultural life of the early New York community. All of this recent work makes clear that the still prevalent exclusion of women and oppressed peoples from history makes a balanced historical account impossible.

The study of women in history and society has also drawn attention to the personal or testimonial dimension of social experi-

ence. The field of oral history has been most important in this respect, as has the prominence of biography and autobiography in feminist historiography. As evidenced by the samples included in this issue, the auto-biographical mode serves as the key means of women's literary expression. Appropriately, the analysis of Puerto Rican women writers by **Margarite Fernández Olmos** focuses on the tradition of the Bildungsroman or educational novel, a fictional genre whose structural principle is the personal psychological development of the female protagonist.

The growing number of Latina writers in the U.S., such as **Milagros Pérez Huth** and **Julia Alvarez**, is a further sign of increased activity in all areas of cultural expression. Alvarez, a Dominican writer, is also the subject of **Daisy Cocco de Filippis'** article. In the **Portfolio** section, we highlight a number of female Puerto Rican visual artists living and working in New York.

We need to view all of this creative work as the emergence of new traditions, and as new contributions to ongoing but typically marginalized traditions. Clearly, they form part of Puerto Rican and Dominican culture, both in the Caribbean and in the United States. At the same time they are expressions of women's art and literature in the context of a long standing and universal creative tradition. Most specifically, *puertorriqueñas* and *dominicanas* in the U.S. are women of color, and their cultural concerns and production relate most directly of all to that of their African American, Asian and Native American sisters.

Our ability to discover and center marginalized traditions is predicated on our ability to rewrite history and to counter repressive conceptualizations in the social sciences in order to develop a discourse capable of liberation. The insights offered by feminist theory towards this end and the relation of that body of thought to the realities of Puerto Rican women is the subject of **Celina Romany's** article. In the **Mi Gente** interviews with **Antonia Pantoja** and **Esperanza Martell**, we capture some of the collective memory and practical lessons of the experience of Puerto Rican women in political organizations in New York City from the 1940s through the 1970s.

The work contained in this issue of the **Bulletin** seeks to open new horizons in the struggle of Puerto Rican women at a time when the gains made by women and working people are under increasing attack. The emergent intellectual activity by Puerto Ricans and other Latinos is reason for great optimism, as is the attention now being paid to the experience of Puerto Rican women. ❑

EDITORIAL*EDITORIAL*

En los últimos veinte años ha surgido un creciente número de trabajos relacionados con el tema de la mujer. Estos escritos han ayudado a profundizar nuestro conocimiento de la naturaleza y extensión de la participación de la mujer en todas las esferas de la realidad social.

Este número del **Boletín** está dedicado a destacar algunos de los recientes trabajos producidos principalmente por y sobre mujeres puertorriqueñas y latinas.

El campo de la historia ha estado, hasta recientemente, bajo el dominio exclusivo de una élite tradicional masculina. El llamado para una "Historia desde abajo" o una "Historia del pueblo" ha empezado a concretizarse gracias al renacimiento de los movimientos obreros y de la mujer. Además, el surgimiento del "Tercer Mundo", como secuela de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, añadió su voz a los que demandaban que la contribución de los colonizados fuera incluida en los esfuerzos por reorientar la historiografía de carácter eurocéntrica.

El término "Historia del pueblo" abarca una variedad de escritos, algunos de ellos moldeados por las ideas de progreso. Su temática varía también, aunque los esfuerzos siempre se dirigen a destacar las experiencias del pueblo. El foco en algunos casos es en cultura y psicología, en otros casos es en movimientos sociales, la familia y vidas particu-

lares. La nueva historiografía, impulsada por el movimiento feminista, toma en consideración a las mujeres como trabajadoras, como militantes y partícipes en la lucha y como parte de la sociedad capitalista.

Los artículos de **Amílcar Tirado Avilés** y **María del Carmen Baerga** enfocan en la historia de las mujeres en las industrias del tabaco y la aguja en Puerto Rico. Estos prestan atención a la relación entre la producción fuera del hogar y la reproducción de la familia. La incorporación de las mujeres a la producción, concluyen estos autores, está condicionada por el género tanto como por la clase social.

La contribución de la mujer a la vida económica, política y social en el Puerto Rico del siglo diecinueve es el tema que desarrolla **Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim.** En cambio, **Altagracia Ortiz** concentra en la experiencia migratoria de la mujer puertorriqueña. En su ensayo bibliográfico destaca las aportaciones de éstas a la vida política, intelectual y cultural de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York. Estos trabajos hacen claro que la exclusión de la mujer y de la gente oprimida que aún prevalece hace imposible producir un recuento histórico balanceado.

El estudio de la mujer en la historia y en la sociedad también ha tornado su atención a la dimensión personal o testimonial de la experiencia social. En este respecto, el campo de la historia oral ha sido el más importante, como lo ha sido la biografía y la autobiografía en la historiografía feminista. El modelo autobiográfico, como se evidencia en los ejemplos incluidos, sirve como el principal vehículo de expresión literaria de la mujer. Apropiadamente, el intenso análisis que hace **Margarite Fernández Olmos** de las escritoras puertorriqueñas enfoca en la tradición del "Bildungsroman", o novela educativa, género de ficción cuyo principio estructural es el desarrollo personal y psicológico de la protagonista femenina.

El creciente número de escritoras latinas en los EEUU, como **Milagros Pérez Huth** y **Julia Alvarez**, es un signo adicional de la ascendente actividad que se está desarrollando en todas las áreas de expresión cultural. El trabajo de Alvarez, una escritora dominicana, sirve además como tema del artículo de **Daisy Cocco de Filippis.** En los **Portafolios** destacamos a varias de las artistas visuales puertorriqueñas que están viviendo y trabajando en Nueva York. Todo este trabajo creativo tiene que ser ubicado dentro del surgimiento de nuevas tradiciones, y como nuevas contribuciones a tradiciones actuales pero típicamente marginadas. Estas forman claramente parte de la cultura puertorriqueña y dominicana, tanto en el Caribe como en los EEUU. Al mismo tiempo, son expresiones de arte y literatura de la mujer en el sentido de una larga y universal tradición creativa. Más específicamente, las puertorriqueñas y dominicanas en los EEUU son "mujeres de color", y sus preocupaciones culturales y producción artística están más estrechamente relacionadas con las de sus hermanas afro-americanas, asiáticas e indias-americanas.

Nuestra habilidad para descubrir y centralizar tales tradiciones dependerá de nuestra capacidad para re-escribir la historia y para oponernos a conceptualizaciones tradicionales represivas presentes en las ciencias sociales y, a la misma vez, desarrollar un discurso con capacidad liberadora. La visión que hacia este fin ofrece la teoría feminista y la relación de este pensamiento a la realidad de la mujer puertorriqueña es el tema que desarrolla **Celina Romany.** En las entrevistas de **Mi Gente**, con **Antonia Pantoja** y **Esperanza Martell**, capturamos algunos momentos de la memoria colectiva y algunas lecciones prácticas de la experiencia de la mujer puertorriqueña en organizaciones en Nueva York, durante el periodo de 1940 a los años de 1970.

En síntesis, los trabajos aquí incluidos buscan abrir nuevos horizontes en la lucha de la mujer puertorriqueña en un momento cuando los logros obtenidos por las mujeres están bajo constantes ataques. La creciente actividad intelectual de los puertorriqueños y de otros latinos es razón suficiente para un gran optimismo, como es la atención que se está brindado a la experiencia de la mujer puertorriqueña. ❑

EMERLINDO ALVAREZ
(1951–1989)

Emmo Alvarez embodied the best principles of his generation and of the Centro. He was committed to student empowerment, Puerto Rican independence and to collective work. Emmo was one of the founders of the Centro from his days as a student activist at the Borough of Manhattan Community College. He was a Research Assistant in the Higher Education Task Force since 1981 and staff member of the Boletín since its beginnings. A community activist, he was a founding member of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights.

Como hijo, hermano, esposo, padre, y compañero de trabajo,
Emmo estará siempre presente en nuestros corazones.

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Mujer y sociedad en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX

Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim

La contribución de la mujer puertorriqueña al desarrollo histórico de Puerto Rico apenas comienza a estudiarse durante la década de 1970. Entre los trabajos más destacados que fueron publicados durante los últimos años tenemos los de las pioneras Isabel Picó y Marcia Rivera Quintero. A estos se les unen luego los de Norma Valle, María López Garriga, Mayra Muñoz Vázquez y Blanca Silvestrini, entre otras, los cuales fueron recogidos en las antologías de Nancy Zayas y Edna Acosta-Belén.[1] A partir de estos primeros esfuerzos han ido apareciendo algunos artículos dispersos en diversas revistas del país.[2] Se publicó además, en 1973, un informe sobre la condición de la mujer en Puerto Rico que rindiera la Comisión de Derechos Civiles el año anterior. Sin embargo, todos estos esfuerzos se han dirigido a la problemática de la mujer del siglo veinte.

Para las que queremos estudiar la mujer puertorriqueña del siglo pasado no existen trabajos de base en que apoyarse, lo que hace que la tarea se dificulte. Como apenas comenzamos a indagar sobre este tema, nos limitaremos a presentar los rasgos más sobresalientes de las mujeres de aquella época y de la sociedad en que fueron formadas. Con ese fin, hemos revisado gran parte de la literatura secundaria del siglo pasado y algunas fuentes primarias.

OLGA JIMENEZ DE WAGENHEIM es profesora de historia, Programa de Estudios Puertorriqueños, en la Universidad de Rutgers en Nueva Jersey. Además de haber publicado artículos en diferentes revistas, es autora de *El Grito de Lares: sus causas y sus hombres* (1984).

La mujer en la economía y la sociedad

Para entender a la mujer puertorriqueña del siglo pasado es necesario ubicarla dentro del contexto histórico de la isla, la cual seguía siendo colonia de España, gobernada por militares autoritarios, dependiente económicamente de una producción agrícola para la exportación, y socialmente dividida tanto por clases como por razas. Las condiciones de vida en la colonia a partir de 1850 eran extremadamente duras para la mayoría de los criollos debido a las privaciones económicas y a la intolerancia política. Para las mujeres, la situación era peor porque sufrían además la falta de oportunidades educativas, el régimen del patriarcado, y el constante condicionamiento promovido por la Iglesia Católica a través de sus mitos religiosos.[3]

Sin embargo, no todas las mujeres eran sometidas a las mismas condiciones ni sufrían de la mismas forma. Las mujeres del siglo diecinueve, al igual que la sociedad de la cual provenían, se dividían entre las

campesinas y las urbanas, las de la clase pobre y las de la clase acomodada, las criollas blancas y las mulatas y negras. Había también entre ellas las que poseían haciendas y otras propiedades y las que eran domésticas y esclavas al servicio de sus amas. Como ejemplos citaremos algunos casos.

Según el censo de 1869, la población del país sumaba a sobre 600,000 habitantes. De estos, el 53.8 por ciento eran clasificados como blancos y los demás como pardos libres y negros esclavos. El mismo censo indica que la población femenina superaba a la masculina por 14,519 personas.[4] Entre las mujeres se encontraban unas 18,617 esclavas, cuyas tareas eran todas aquellas no consideradas dignas para las damas de la clase acomodada.

Entre las mujeres campesinas de la clase hacendada encontramos que aún las que estuvieron vinculadas al movimiento revolucionario de 1868 se desempeñaban con soltura en las transacciones comerciales que envolvían las compras y ventas de terrenos y esclavos. Encontramos tanto viudas como solteras y mujeres casadas comprando, vendiendo, hipotecando y demandando a sus deudores con el mismo rigor que lo hacían los hombres de su clase. Solamente en el caso de la mujer casada se requería el permiso del marido para que éstas pudieran llevar a cabo sus transacciones comerciales.[5] Aunque no hemos hecho todavía ningún estudio detallado de la posición real de estas mujeres dentro de la economía rural, creemos que es significativo que tuvieran la libertad de participar en la formación del capital familiar.

Entre dichas mujeres encontramos a doña Rosa Medina de Font, madre de los bien conocidos separaristas de San Sebastián, reclamándole al gobierno la debida compensación por los cinco esclavos que le había emancipado en 1873.[6] Una hermana de los revolucionarios Pol, de Lares, doña Francisca Pol y Segarra declaró tener de su propiedad seis esclavos para el año 1867. Uno de ellos, según su propia declaración, era hijo de la cocinera Anita, quien muriera en su servicio sin lograr la coartación.[7] Señalamos estos ejemplos como meros recordatorios de que cualquier estudio que se proponga acerca de las condiciones de la mujer en el siglo pasado tendrá que obligadamente estudiar la naturaleza de la sociedad que permitía no solamente la explotación de la mujer por el hombre sino también la de una mujer por otra.

Entre las mujeres de la clase rural pobre encontramos un caso de una joven que demanda a un terrateniente por tomar posesión de sus tierras sin su autorización. En un juicio de paz que se celebrara en Lares en 1862, la joven Brígida Gerena le reclama al Dr. José Cecilio Cuevas seis cuerdas y media que éste comprara de su hermano catorce años antes, por la cantidad de 62 pesos. Según Gerena, ella era menor de edad y su hermano no tenía derecho a disponer de su tierra. Añade que como el valor real de la tierra en cuestión eran 300 pesos, Cuevas debía pagarle 25 pesos anuales por los usufructos que obtuvo desde que compró el terreno. El juez falló a favor de Cuevas en el primer juicio. Gerena apeló el caso, llevando de su parte al juez de paz don Rafael Ramírez, y esta vez la corte falló a favor de la demandante Brígida Gerena.[8] Demás está decir que no todos los casos llevados ante el tribunal por mujeres resultaban victoriosos. Veamos el caso de Cándida Orta.

En Lares, en 1856 se celebró un juicio de conciliación en que la joven Cándida Orta le reclama matrimonio a su primo, don Antonio Escofet, por haberla fecundado. En este caso, el joven Antonio, acompañado por su padre y su testigo, acepta ser el causante de "la deshonra" de su prima, pero se niega a casarse con ella bajo el pretexto de que no tiene dinero. Ofrece, sin embargo, como muestra de su buena fe, darle 16 pesos para que la futura madre regrese a la casa de su familia en Yauco. El juez da el caso por terminado luego de amonestar al padre y al hijo por la falta de educación

cristiana que hacía que se incurriera en estas faltas.[9]

Entre los casos que también llaman la atención están los de mujeres de la clase pobre de los pueblos que se escapaban de sus hogares para irse a vivir solas al interior de la isla y las que se dedicaban a la prostitución. Ambos casos llevaron a las autoridades a partir de 1820 a fijar avisos y a tomar medidas correctivas. El gobernador don Miguel de la Torre mandó a cerrar aquellos planteles públicos que de algún modo se dedicaran a propagar los juegos y la prostitución.[10] Varias décadas más tarde se quejaba uno de los ciudadanos de San Juan de estas mujeres cuando decía:

> .... avergüenza, horroriza, oir y ver, no ya de noche, sino en pleno día, a esa falange de mujeres...que por doquiera dejan el rastro inmundo de su inmoralidad.[11]

Con respecto a las que se fugaban de sus hogares, especialmente las que abandonaban a sus maridos, el gobernador amenazó con enviar a la cárcel a cualquier persona que las ayudase a fugarse hacia el interior. El castigo era el mismo que el que se imponía a los que protegieran la fuga de esclavos y menores.[12] Aunque no tenemos las cifras de cuantas mujeres tomaron la ruta del cimarrón, consideramos que es significativo que éstas rompieran las tradiciones que las destinaban a ser vigilidas por los varones de la familia mientras permanecían sumidas en los eternos papeles de hijas sumisas, madres abnegadas, y esposas devotas. La decisión de marcharse lejos de sus hogares podría verse como parte de la lucha por la emancipación de la mujer del siglo pasado.

Cómo sobrevivían estas mujeres en una sociedad agrícola, cuya economía ofrecía limitadas oportunidades para ganarse la vida, sigue siendo un misterio. A partir de 1849 las autoridades al reglamentar el trabajo incluyeron a las mujeres entre los denominados jornaleros. Sin embargo, hasta el momento no hemos encontrado ningún registro que de fe de cuantas mujeres trabajaban a jornal en las faenas agrícolas. Tampoco hemos encontrado evidencia de esta labor en los censos de la época. Solamente en el censo de 1899 que llevara a cabo los Estados Unidos, al tomar posesión de la isla, encontramos a 3,910 mujeres dedicadas a tareas agrícolas.[13]

Tal parece que las jornaleras se emplearon como cocineras, lavanderas y sirvientas en las casas de los hacendados y gente acomodada, mientras que las costureras, bordadoras y tejedoras trabajaban desde sus casas. Sabemos que la mujer formaba parte de la clase trabajadora pero no tenemos evidencia de lo que significaba su contribución. Lo que sí queda bastante claro es que las mujeres de la clase pobre eran en su mayoría víctimas de la explotación. Una cita del Dr. Ferrer escenifica la tragedia de muchas de estas mujeres:

> Con familia ya, y obligada por el deber...de ganarse el sustento para ella y para sus hijos (trabaja) todo el día (sin) una alimentación adecuada...(respirando) un aire viciado...concluye por estragarse y acabar con su vida.[14]

Si se compara las condiciones en que vivían las mujeres de la clase pobre con las de las de la clase acomodada da la impresión que estas últimas llevaban vidas muy placenteras. Las mujeres de la clase alta no estaban obligadas a trabajar fuera de la casa para asegurarse el sustento. Sabido es que los recursos de sus padres o esposos les proporcionaban no solo una buena alimentación, sino buena ropa, buen calzado, deleites de todas clases y tiempo para disfrutarlos. El problema estriba en que todos estos beneficios tenían también su precio. De acuerdo a ese gran observador, el Dr. Ferrer, la mujer de la clase alta pagaba el privilegio de ser protegida y mantenida con su libertad y a veces hasta con la vida misma. Según este señor, las hijas de los adinerados pasaban parte de la

niñez y la adolescencia encerradas en sus casas en preparación para el matrimonio. Desde los diez años se les ocupaba en la costura, el tejido y el bordado. Las de mayores recursos también aprendían a tocar el piano.[15]

A los doce años, continúa Ferrer, se les daba por señoritas y bajo la tutela de la madre se llevaban a los bailes y otras funciones prometedoras para el matrimonio. Día tras día seguían sus vidas sedentarias, encerradas, prisioneras de la moda de la época, la cual las obligaba a sufrir los rigores del corsé y terminaban víctimas de dolores en el pecho, de inapetencia, y de un malestar y una tristeza que aturdía tanto a los familiares como a los médicos.[16]

En fin, que las que mejor estaban económicamente no estaban tampoco libres de las ataduras y presiones que la sociedad reservaba para las mujeres. Es en contra de esas ataduras que las mujeres de la clase acomodada comienzan a sublevarse al ir tras una educación.

La mujer en el sistema educativo

Aunque siempre hubo hombres que defendieron la educación para mujeres, son ellas las que una vez logran dominar los principios de la enseñanza se dedican a propagarlos entre las niñas a través de varios pueblos de la isla. Dentro de una economía agrícola como la del Puerto Rico decimonónico, el magisterio se convierte en una de las pocas oportunidades de empleo remunerado para las mujeres de la clase media. Hasta mediados de siglo, la mayoría de las escuelas que enseñaban tanto a las hijas de los pobres como de hacendados y comerciantes eran las escuelas particulares de las maestras del pueblo.

En San Juan, la célebre mulata doña Celestina Cordero funda en 1820 una de las primeras escuelas que dará cabida a niñas al igual que a niños.[17] En los pueblos del interior dichas escuelas no logran establecerse hasta después de la década de 1830, y aún estas tendrán sus dificultades en atraer niñas de la clase adinerada que pudieran sufragar los gastos de la enseñanza. Como la responsabilidad de la educación era asunto del municipio, en los más pobres se quedaban casi todos los niños y niñas sin instrucción.

Entre los documentos municipales de Camuy de 1859 aparecen noticias de la enseñanza que se le impartía a tanto niños como niñas. Las dos escuelas del pueblo informaron que seguían el mismo currículo, excepto que la escuela de los varones enseñaba también aritmética. Las horas de estudio eran las mismas, tres horas en la mañana y tres en la tarde. Los castigos y premios eran idénticos. Lo que variaba era el número de estudiantes, la composición social, y el patrón de asistencia. Muchos más varones que hembras de la clase adinerada asistían a la escuela . En 1859, en la escuela de varones se matricularon 13 niños "pudientes" y 14 pobres, mientras que en la de las niñas habían tres pudientes y 19 pobres. En la escuela de las niñas la maestra se quejaba de que le era difícil completar las tareas asignadas por las muchas faltas de asistencia.[18]

En 1865, el gobernador publica un decreto destinado a regular la enseñanza, el cual exigía que se educara un mayor número de alumnos en cada pueblo. Ese decreto da lugar a que una maestra en Mayagüez, doña Efigenia Burgos, se quejara de que las nuevas disposiciones aumentarían su pobreza. Explicaba ella que unos diez años antes las maestras tenían la responsabilidad de educar no más de15 niñas pobres por la cantidad que le pagaba el municipio de 30 pesos mensuales. Ese arreglo, según doña Efigenia, al menos le dejaba tiempo y espacio en el salón de clases para educar niñas de la clase acomodada, con cuyas matrículas suplementaba su sueldo.

Planteaba que ya que las nuevas exigencias de ley no le dejarían tiempo para educar las niñas pudientes que se le incrementara su sueldo. Y a modo de justificación para su pedido, agregaba,

que mientras ella devengaba un sueldo de 33 pesos mensuales por educar 80 niñas, el maestro de los varones recibía 125 pesos al mes por sus 50 alumnos. Por lo tanto, pedía que se ajustara su sueldo al estipulado por ley, que equivalía a dos terceras partes del que ganaba el maestro.[19]

El ayuntamiento tuvo a bien la solicitud de doña Efigenia y recomendó que se le pagara 83 pesos mensuales. Sin embargo, cuatro años más tarde cuando la plaza quedó vacante, al casarse doña Efigenia, el municipio la anunció con un sueldo de 35 pesos mensuales. Entre las que aspiraron a dicha plaza se encontraba doña Alejandrina Benítez, una de las poetisas más reconocidas de la literatura puertorriqueña del siglo pasado. A pesar de sus credenciales no consiguió el puesto doña Alejandrina porque el gobernador se había tomado la libertad de nombrar a una maestra de Río Piedras que se mudaba para Mayagüez.[20]

A pesar de los esfuerzos que hicieron varias mujeres por propagar la educación en Puerto Rico encontramos que a fines del siglo pasado imperaba el analfabetismo. Tal situación da lugar a que varios defensores de los derechos de la mujer, como lo eran Salvador Brau, y el Dr. Gabriel Ferrer, entre otros se planteen el problema de la educación de la mujer como una necesidad.

Según el Dr. Ferrer, una mujer educada sería no solamente un buen ejemplo para sus hijos, sino una mejor compañera para un esposo ilustrado. Según Ferrer:

> El hombre,...mejor ilustrado [que la mujer] llega a cansarse de la conversación insulsa de la esposa. Sus modales ásperos, su desenvoltura quizás le repugnan; el no poder pedirle consejo le desespera, lo impertinente de sus exigencias lo llenan de ira.[21]

Mientras que para Ferrer la preocupación se limitaba a la educación de la mujer urbana, para Brau la educación de la mujer tenía que incluir la campesina. En un apasionado ensayo que escribiera en 1888, dice que es en el campo donde hay la necesidad de escuelas, ya que es allí donde reside el 81 por ciento de la población del país. Añade que de esa población más de 36 por ciento se componía de mujeres campesinas, las cuales vivían en el mayor estado de ignorancia.

Como remedio, recomendaba Brau que se destinaran algunas de las 257 escuelas rurales en el país para enseñarles a las niñas. Según su juicio era necesario educar a la mujer campesina antes que al hombre ya que su "instinto de madre y esposa haría de ésta una palanca poderosísima que vendría en ayuda del desarrollo intelectual de país."[22]

De modo, que ya para las últimas dos décadas del siglo pasado se postulaba la educación de la mujer como una necesidad para el seno familiar. Según Brau, Ferrer, y otros, había que educar a la mujer para que ayudara a sus hijos, y fuera una mejor compañera. En fin, que ni aún sus más preclaros defensores vieron la educación de la mujer como un instrumento para su propio bien.

A pesar de estos planteamientos, el estado no cambió su política en cuanto a la educación femenina. Por consiguiente, termina el siglo sin que establezcan escuelas públicas de segunda enseñanza para mujeres. Según Brau, la única escuela superior pública para niñas en la isla, en 1880, se encontraba en Mayagüez. Esto hace que unos 25 años más tarde la taza de analfabetismo entre las mujeres puertorriqueñas sea de un 80 por ciento.[23]

Entre la minoría de mujeres que lograron educarse no hemos encontrado aún ningún trabajo que nos explique como se sentían ellas antes las nuevas responsabilidades que les asignaban sus defensores.Tal vez el hecho mismo de que los planteamientos en su defensa se hacían desde la premisa de que las mujeres eran moralmente superior a los hombres imposibilitaba cualquier crítica que alguna de ellas

pudo haber tenido. Por otro lado, cabe también la posibilidad, de que ellas mismas compartieran dichas opiniones, y por tanto no tuvieran objeción a las nuevas tareas.

Sabido es que en Puerto Rico no se da un movimiento feminista a favor de los derechos de la mujer hasta el siglo presente. Sin embargo, a lo largo del siglo pasado se distinguen algunas mujeres en la lucha por la independencia de Puerto Rico.

La mujer en favor de la independencia

Entre las primeras en darse a conocer por su labor política fue María Mercedes Barbudo, quien fuera encarcelada en El Morro en 1824, por considerársele que había conspirado en contra del gobierno español en Puerto Rico. Según los informes oficiales, esta mujer se dedicaba a fomentar la revolución entre la juventud de San Juan al repartir la literatura incendiaria que recibía desde Venezuela. Al cabo de un juicio de cuatro días, Barbudo fue condenada al exilio y enviada a Cuba. Se le embarcó en el buque *El Marinero* con instrucciones de no regresar al país hasta tanto hubiese desistido de sus ideas. Aparentemente Barbudo no cambió de parecer porque nunca más regresó a Puerto Rico.[24]

Hasta la revuelta de septiembre de 1868 no se conoce ningún otro caso de mujeres que conspiraron en contra del régimen colonial. Y a pesar de que solamente tres mujeres fueron sumariadas por su participación directa en la conspiración que resultó en el Grito de Lares, hubo muchas más que contribuyeron a la causa rebelde, apoyando a sus maridos, padres y hermanos.

Entre las dos más conocidas, tenemos a Mariana Bracetti, quien fuera llevada a la prisión de Lares por haber cosido la bandera que habían de enabolar los rebeldes el día de la independencia. A Mariana se le mantuvo presa hasta enero de 1869, cuando el gobierno revolucionario español decretó una amnistía general para todos los presos políticos en Puerto Rico.[25] Se cree que Mariana estaba encinta y que perdió su niño debido a las deplorables condiciones de la cárcel. Hasta el momento no hemos encontrado evidencia de que esto sea cierto.

La otra mujer que sufrió cárcel, aunque apenas es conocida, fue la liberta Francisca Brignoni. Dulcera de oficio, la mulata Brignoni se le acusó de andar por las calles de Ponce incitando a los negros del pueblo a que "se unieran a la pelea." Por estas acusaciones se mantuvo a Brignoni presa hasta que se decretó la amnistía general de 1869.[26]

Mientras que doña Eduviges Beauchamp, la que junto a sus hermanos compartiera la labor revolucionaria de la junta "Capá Prieto", se libró de la cárcel a pesar de que su nombre aparece en la lista de los sumariados. En algunos círculos hasta se llegó a creer que era ella quien había cosido la bandera, y por lo tanto se le llamó también "Brazo de Oro". Aunque no tenemos documentación que explique porque doña Eduviges no fue a la cárcel, creemos que la gran fortuna de su familia muy bien pudo intervenir a su favor.[26]

Entre las que no son sumariadas, pero que se encuentra evidencia en la documentación de la revuelta de Lares, tenemos en Lares, a las célebres hermanas Serrano; en San Sebastián, a doña Rosa Medina de Font y doña Ana Pumarejo. En Mayagüez estaban también las Brugman y las Arroyo, quienes, al igual que las otras, se distinguieron por su colaboración y su apoyo a la causa revolucionaria.

Entre las de la clase jornalera hubo también mujeres que se dieron a la lucha por la independencia, arriesgando su seguridad personal por ir tras un ideal, que si bien no les prometía emanciparlas de sus padres y maridos, al menos les obligaba a plantearse la idea de que todo ser humano tiene el derecho a ser libre.

Tal vez el hecho mismo de que la revolución no triunfe hace que la lucha por la liberación femenina en Puerto Rico se estanque. Pues la condición colonial de ayer, como la de hoy, no ha hecho otra cosa que obligar a la mujer

puertorriqueña a desatender su lucha para dedicarse a la otra lucha.

Conclusiones

Queremos dejar claro que los ejemplos que hasta aquí hemos dado en cuanto a la variada contribución de la mujer puertorriqueña del siglo pasado ha sido más bien apuntar hacia unas nuevas rutas que podrían resultar fructíferas para el conocimiento propio. De paso, hemos señalado algunas fuentes documentales que bien podrían explorarse.

Creemos que para entender las mujeres puertorriqueñas del pasado siglo se hace necesario indagar más allá de la literatura secundaria, la cual tiende a ceñirse a biografiar las vidas de algunas de la clase acomodada. Y en otros casos se reduce a meras interpretaciones masculinas del mundo de la mujer.

Como ni lo uno ni lo otro es enteramente satisfactorio a estas alturas, debemos acudir a otras fuentes, tales como cartas, diarios, poemas y ensayos escritos por aquellas mujeres educadas, para así empezar a reconstruir sus percepciones del momento histórico que les tocó vivir. Pero para las otras mujeres, las de la clase pobre, que tampoco sabían leer ni escribir, para esas hay que buscar en otras fuentes, como los Protocolos Notariales, los Juicios de Paz y de Conciliación, los Registros Eclesiasticos y Civiles, los Libros de Bautismo y de Hacienda, y la literatura de ficción.

De todas y cada una de estas fuentes pueden escribirse valiosas monografías, que a su vez, nos permitan entender la sociedad puertorriqueña del siglo pasado desde una perspectiva femenina. ❑

ENDNOTES

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EL TORO
DE LA SELVA
FABRICA DE CIGARRILLOS
FABRICA DE CIGARRILLOS
TORO Y Cª S. en C. SAN JUAN P.R.
PORTO RICAN-AMERICAN TOBACCO CO. SUCCESSOR

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EL TORO FACTORY, SAN JUAN.

Notas sobre el desarrollo de la industria del tabaco en Puerto Rico y su impacto en la mujer puertorriqueña, 1898–1920

Amílcar Tirado Avilés

La industria del tabaco en Puerto Rico se convirtió, en su fase de la manufactura, en una industria clave en la incorporación de la mujer puertorriqueña a la fuerza de trabajo. Esto ocurrió previo al despunte de la industria de la aguja—en talleres o a domicilio—donde existió un predominio de la mano de obra de la mujer. A pesar de lo temprano de su integración a la fuerza de trabajo y las repercusiones que tuvo su participación en esta industria, así como en la sociedad puertorriqueña en general, se ha escrito muy poco sobre las mujeres que en ella trabajaron.[1] De la misma manera, hay que señalar la existencia de una limitada literatura escrita analizando la importancia económica de esta industria y su impacto en diferentes ordenes de la sociedad puertorriqueña.

Ciertamente que la industria de cigarros en Estados Unidos constituía una industria en decadencia—la competencia del cigarrillo la estaba arruinando—cuando llegó a Puerto Rico. Sin embargo, en la isla tuvo una gran importancia económica durante las primeras décadas del presente siglo y sirvió de apertura a la visibilidad de la mujer. Su importancia se puede notar en el número que progresivamente fueron empleándose en esta industria, así como por la militancia y sentido de lucha que los trabajadores en este sector desarrollaron, principalmente a través de la Federación Libre de los Trabajadores (FLT) y del Partido Socialista. Otro hecho notable fue el impacto que tuvo en en sus relaciones familiares el integrarse al trabajo de una fábrica bajo condiciones no acostumbradas hasta aquel momento.

Su incorporación a esta industria se dió dentro de un cambio de orientación política y económica reflejada en los intereses que predominaron con el nuevo orden colonial.

Colonialismo e industria

En 1898 las tropas norteamericanas invadieron la isla durante su guerra con España. En virtud del Tratado de París, que puso fin a las hostilidades, Puerto Rico se convirtió en territorio norteamericano. El nuevo régimen colonial afectó la vida política, económica y social del país. De 1898 a 1900 ejerció el control del país con su ejército de ocupación. Durante las primeras dos décadas del siglo 20 fueron aprobadas por el Congreso norteamericano dos leyes orgánicas para Puerto Rico, que sirvieron para legalizar las bases de las relaciones coloniales entre ambos países. La ley Foraker (1900) estableció el gobierno civil para la isla; diseñó el tipo de relación económica y abrió las puertas al capital norteameri-

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cano. La ley Jones (1917) reafirmó las relaciones coloniales e impuso sin consulta la ciudadanía norteamericana a los puertorriqueños.

Aquí se sentaron las bases para el monopolio del azúcar, así como también las bases para el desarrollo de la industria del tabaco. La industria del café perdió su importancia como producto principal en la economía del país. En la situación del café influyó el huracán San Ciriaco que azotó a Puerto Rico en 1898 causando graves daños a esta industria; la pérdida de sus mercados europeos y el haber sido excluído de las tarifas protectoras del mercado norteamericano. La mejor tierra agrícola fue concentrada en pocas manos, lo mismo ocurrió con el capital disponible para la inversión. La cláusula limitando la tenencia de tierras a 500 acres, presente en la ley Foraker, no se puso en vigor o no se respetó en la medidad que lo exigían las circunstancias.

La acelerada influencia del capital norteamericano se nota en la inmediata acaparación de la tierra, concentrando la producción agrícola en el monocultivo de un producto: la caña de azúcar. Ya para 1905 se habían establecido tres de las cuatro grandes corporaciones azucareras. A saber: South Porto Rico Sugar Company, Fajardo Sugar Company y Central Aguirre Sugar Company (la cuarta, United Porto Rican Sugar Company, se estableció en 1926).[2] Ese capital mayormente absentista que controlaba el azúcar representaba una violación a la cláusula de los 500 acres y para 1917 el número de compañías en exceso de los 500 acres eran unas 477. En el corto espacio de tiempo entre 1899 y 1929 la tierra dedicada al cultivo de la caña aumentó de 72,146 acres a 251,018 acres.[3]

Por otro lado, el tabaco recibió directamente la influencia y el impacto del capital norteamericano disponible para la inversión. De esta forma ocurrió una acelerada expansión en el área del tabaco, el cual se convirtió en el segundo producto en importancia para la exportación. La tierra para su cultivo aumentó de 6,000 acres en 1899 a 30,000 acres en 1929.[4] Además, sentó las bases para el desarrollo de una industria basada en la elaboración de la hoja. Por ejemplo, de una producción de 100,000 cigarros para la exportación en 1899 se pasó a una producción de 223,316,450 en 1920.[5]

La naciente industria tabaquera empezó a ser acaparada por varias compañías norteamericanas, principalmente por la American Tobacco Company (ATC). Los orígenes de esta compañía se remontan a 1890 cuando los cinco principales fabricantes de cigarrillos en los Estados Unidos (W. Duke Sons and Co.; Allen and Ginter; Kinney Tobacco Co.; William S. Kimball and Co.; Goodwin and Co.) se unieron en lo que se conoció como el Trust del tabaco. El monopolio creado en el área del cigarrillo les permitió usar las ganancias generadas para invadir otras áreas de la industria del tabaco. Después de 1894 ya era una fuerza dominante en todas las líneas de la fabricación de tabaco—exceptuando la de cigarros.[6] El grado de control de esta corporación era tal que para 1894, a pesar de la depresión en los Estados Unidos, la compañía tuvo una ganancia neta de cinco millones.[7]

La ATC se caracterizó por una política de absorción y dominación de otras compañías con el propósito de evitar la competencia. Algunas de sus tácticas eran las siguientes: compraban participación en determinada compañía o les hacían ofertas difíciles de rechazar; aplicaban presiones violentas para expandir negocios adquiridos; realizaban convenios secretos con empresarios de otros negocios. En el caso de Puerto Rico, en la compra de la fábrica de Luis A. Toro y la de Rucabado y Portela se siguió un patrón similar al usado en los Estados Unidos. A ambos le compraron sus propiedades pero las empresas continuaron funcionando bajo la dirección de éstos. Sin embargo, para 1908 se quejaba Fausto Rucabado de las tácticas de la ATC al señalar que:

"They will not only be surprised, but horrorized and panic-stricken,

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should they learn the real truth concerning the so-called purchase of said firm, and the numberless persecutions that the members of said firm, and even their families, have been submitted to, on account, that one of their members, discovered in time, that they played a crooked game, and threw it in their face with not despising contempt."[8]

La ATC, dentro de su política de absorción y dominación, hizo planes para entrar de lleno en la fabricación de cigarros. Con este propósito organizaron la American Cigar Company, incorporada en New Jersey, el 12 de enero de 1901. Ya para ese año se encontraban establecidos en Puerto Rico mediante una subsidiaria: la Porto Rican American Tobacco Company (PRATCO). Incorporada en New Jersey, el 22 de septiembre de 1899, PRATCO era producto de la compra que le hicieron a Toro y Rucabado.

La compañía funcionó, entre 1899 y 1912, como una subsidiaria de la ATC. En dicho año, por motivo de la decisión del Tribunal Supremo, se le declaró independiente de la ATC. Posteriormente, en marzo de 1919, se incorporó en la isla como PRATCO de Puerto Rico y

Mujeres trabajando en el despalillado de tabaco.

adquirió todas aquellas posesiones en la isla que previamente estaban en poder de la PRATCO de New Jersey. A saber: 8 plantas para la fabricación de cigarros y cigarrillos; una fábrica de cajas y un almacen.[9]

A pesar de haber adquirido las fábricas para ambos productos, el propósito iniciar de la ATC era desarrollar un comercio en gran escala basado en la fabricación de cigarrillos. Los cigarros no entraban en sus planes originales tanto porque en los Estados Unidos era un producto que iba en decadencia como porque no habían podido monopolizarlo frente a la competencia. El principal problema de la ATC en su objetivo de monopolizar la producción de cigarros en los E.U. era la falta de una maquinaria, rápida y eficaz, que permitiera abaratar los costos de producción. En el área del cigarro el trabajo era manual y sólo en algunas tareas del proceso se usaba algún tipo de maquinaria. Hasta 1917 no existió una máquina relativamente eficaz para hacer cigarros. Por otro lado, los centros de fabricación de cigarros eran relativamente pequeños y no requerían una substancial inversión de dinero.

Todos estos obstáculos fueron superados en Puerto Rico y prontamente consiguieron la absorción de las principales fábricas operando en el país. La falta de maquinaria se compensó con una abundancia de mano de obra barata; con una falta de organización obrera en este ramo; con el uso de la mujer para substituir al elemento organizado y pagar salarios aún más bajos; a medida que se fueron incorporando las máquinas las mujeres fueron dominando el mercado de trabajo. A fin de cuentas, Puerto Rico se acomodaba al plan trazado en la creación de la American Cigar Company. Aquí se convirtió en un producto al que le sacaron gran provecho económico y pudieron monopolizar. En un momento dado, tenían bajo su control 3/5 partes de los cigarros que se producían en la isla. En el caso de los cigarrillos la proporción era mayor.[10] Los cigarros eran mayormente para la exportación al mercado norteamericano.[11]

Ese acaparamiento no solo significó el monopolio de la industria sino que vino acompañado de unos cambios en el modo de producción. La producción artesanal dió paso a una producción basada en la división del trabajo. La elaboración del tabaco teniendo bajo su control casi todas las fases del trabajo quedó solo para los chinchales. En cambio, el nuevo modo de producción en la elaboración del tabaco se concentró en grandes edificios que albergaban un gran número de trabajadores. Ya para 1910, tres cuartas partes de los que trabajaban en las fábricas de tabaco lo hacían en lugares que alojaban más de 100 trabajadores. Las compañías elaboradoras de cigarros y cigarrillos y hojas para la exportación eran las únicas que empleaban más de 1,000 trabajadores en el país. Para 1920, cerca del 80% de la producción del tabaco se realizaba en fábricas con más de 500 empleados.[12]

Los trabajadores de estas fábricas realizaban determinadas tareas en el proceso de la producción de cigarros (despalilladores, escogedores, etc.). De esta forma, el proceso artesanal perdió importancia y, más aún, los trabajadores quedaron afectados por las relaciones salariales que se establecieron.[13] Dejaron de ser dueños del producto de su trabajo para emplearse por un jornal, el cual normalmente era bajo y variaba de acuerdo con la tarea que tenían que realizar. Las decisiones sobre la cantidad de cigarros que se iban a producir o que podía producir quedaron fuera de su control. En ese momento, la proletarización empezó a alcanzar a este sector artesanal.

Las trabajadoras llegaron para quedarse

Los cambios antes mencionados influyeron en la integración de la mujer a este sector económico. Anteriormente su participación se había identificado con tareas de la fase agrícola del tabaco.[14] El trabajo que era realizado predominantemente por hombres vió aparecer en el nuevo orden a la mujer. Lo que contribuyó a romper unos patrones de trabajo

femenino que habían estado centralizados en las tareas del hogar, en el servicio domestico, en la lavandería y en lo que han llamado el trabajo de "colaboración."[15] El tabaco, a los efectos, en el periodo comprendido entre 1899 y 1920, registró el mayor aumento para tipo de empleo femenino no agrícola. En 1899 constituían el 1.6% de la fuerza laboral en la industria del tabaco; para 1910 ya habían alcanzado el 27.8% y para 1920 dominaban el 52.9% de los empleos.

Ciertamente que fue una integración desigual porque las mujeres siempre estuvieron en desventaja en cuanto a las tareas que realizaban y los salarios que recibían. Estas, en la mayor parte de los casos, realizaban tareas asignadas a los trabajadores no-diestros, principalmente en el despalillado.[16] En gran medida, esta situación fue moldeada por el tipo de desarrollo que había tenido la elaboración de cigarros en Puerto Rico con un dominio masculino y gremial. Además, su importancia para la empresa radicaba en que podían pagarle menos y de esta forma abarataban los costos de producción. Ese fenómeno se dió en un contexto similar a lo que estaba ocurriendo en los Estados Unidos con el resurgimiento del interés por integrar a la mujer en esta industria. Aquí los elementos de salarios bajos y menos participación en uniones eran las principales razones para emplearlas.

Por ejemplo, en un estudio realizado en Nueva York, 1902, se indicaba que los patronos preferían a las mujeres por el hecho de que ellas aceptaban salarios más bajos.[17] Otros factores que influyeron para su empleo en la industria tabaquera norteamericana fueron: la formación del trust del tabaco en 1890, que llevó la escala de producción a un punto más avanzado; la introducción del concepto de trabajo en equipo (team work), no tanto para aumentar la producción sino porque se podía emplear una mano de obra más barata.[18]

Las mujeres empleadas en esta industria fueron víctimas de una doble discriminación salarial. Primero, en virtud de dos de las atracciones industriales de Puerto Rico—mano de obra abundante y barata—recibieron salarios de subsistencia. Inclusive, en aquellos años en que la industria mostró ganancias exhorbitantes, las demandas de aumento salarial fueron rechazadas. Una de las situaciones que las empujaba a los movimientos huelgarios. Segundo, el mísero salario que recibían normalmente era menor que el que recibían los hombres que realizaban tareas similares.

Su participación en el movimiento obrero

La incorporación de la mujer a la fuerza de trabajo fue rápidamente seguida por su incorporación al también naciente movimiento obrero puertorriqueño. Los esfuerzos organizativos y políticos que se hicieron partieron de una base amplia donde se tomó en consideración la organización y participación de la mujer como iguales, donde la diferencia de sexo no constituyó un obstáculo para su integración. En las bases organizativas de la Federación Regional de los Trabajadores se declararon en favor de "asociar y unir y federar a todos los trabajadores de ambos sexos."[19]

La FLT recogió en su programa dichos postulados indicando en el Artículo II que "su objetivo era reunir a los trabajadores de ambos sexos de todas las ramas de producción manual." Además, en el Artículo III estipularon que "para los Congresos obreros se nombraría un Comité sobre Organización de la Mujer."[20] Tales preocupaciones quedaron patentes en los diferentes congresos que celebraron. Ya en su tercer congreso, 1903, participaron 55 delegados, entre los cuales se encontraban cinco mujeres. Además, hubo representación de 10 uniones de mujeres y una de las comisiones de trabajo se dedicó a la organización de la mujer. Durante sus deliberaciones se presentaron varias resoluciones relacionadas con la mujer.[21]

En el Quinto Congreso, 1908, se solicitó en la resolución número 39 que el Comité Ejecutivo habilitara una comisión de oficiales que se encargaran

directamente de la organización de la mujer en todos sus aspectos y oficios. Otra resolución, número 30, señalaba que no se consideraría como buen hombre organizado a todo aquel que no organizara a sus familiares femeninos.[22]

En el Sexto Congreso Obrero, celebrado en 1910, se informó que hasta julio de 1909 se habían organizado 37 uniones de mujeres. A saber: 28 uniones protectoras de la mujer, seis uniones de despalilladoras, dos uniones de costureras y modistas y una unión de bordadoras. En ese congreso hubo representación de seis uniones de la mujer y varias mujeres hicieron acto de presencia en el mismo.[23] Entre las resoluciones que se presentaron hubo una que trataba directamente con la organización de la mujer en los distintos oficios: Resolución 59, "Para organizar prácticamente en el seno de la Federación Libre, la mujer obrera del país."[24]

Otra resolución trataba directamente con la necesidad de organizar a la mujer que trabajaba en la naciente industria del tabaco porque éstas eran explotadas, preparadas y adiestradas para ir en contra de los hombres que trabajaban en el tabaco. La resolución sugería que una forma de hacerle frente a la situación era:

> "que todo trabajador organizado de la Ciudad de San Juan y sus barrios, Cataño y Bayamón que sea padre de familia ó tenga sin ser padre una familia bajo su autoridad, y algún miembro femenino de esa familia trabaja allí, estará obligado a hacer que se organice inmediatamente, lo mismo que este Congreso le ordena que en el tiempo que le sea posible trate de organizar a los parientes que en esas condiciones trabajen y sobre los cuales no puede ejercer su autoridad de padre o encargado."[25]

Una de las áreas de trabajo donde se hicieron grandes esfuerzos por organizar a la mujer fue en la elaboración del tabaco. Para el movimiento obrero era importante organizar a todo trabajador conectado con esta industria. Su propósito era evitar que el patrono pagara salarios bajos y/o desiguales; forzarlos a mejorar las condiciones higiénicas de los centros de trabajo; evitar que substituyeran unos obreros por otros en casos de huelga, lo cual debilitaría sus demandas y su poder de negociación. Las despalilladoras y demás mujeres trabajando en esta industria, en su acelerada integración, constituían un grupo al cual había que dirigirse.

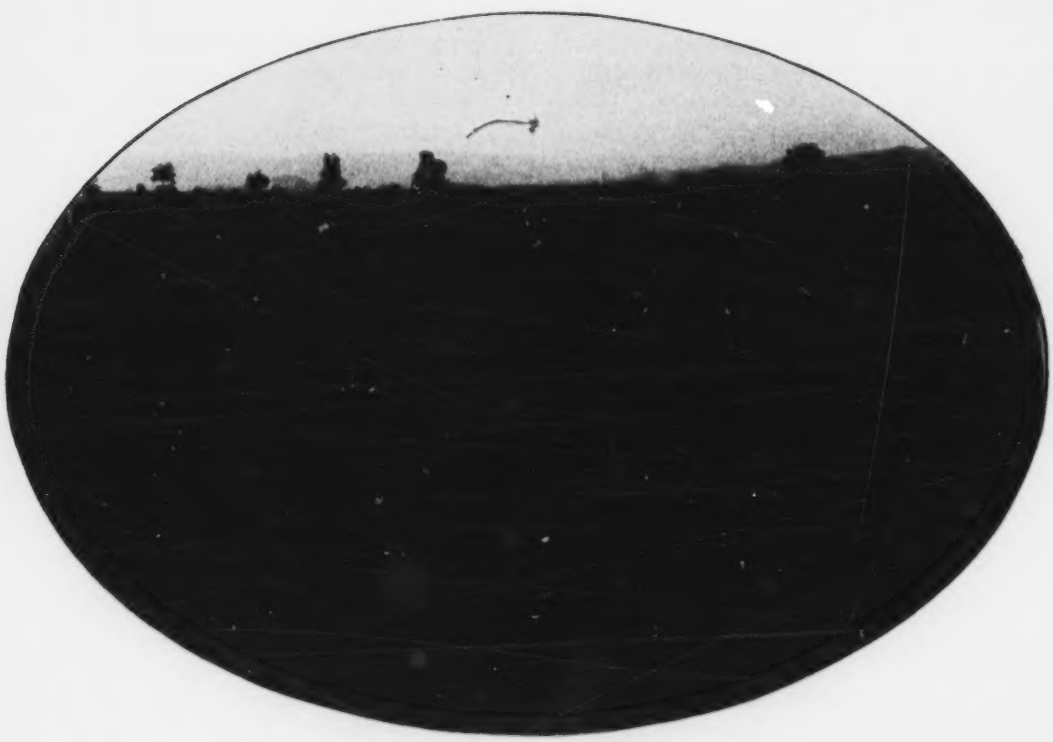
El particular acercamiento a la mujer que trabajaba en el tabaco se hizo principalmente a través de la *Unión de Tabaqueros de Puerto Rico*. El tema de la mujer en la industria se planteó en discusiones y resoluciones presentadas en varias asambleas de esta Unión. Además, en la labor directa de integrarlas a la organización que se estaba formando con el propósito de agrupar bajo un sólo organismo a todos aquellos que laboraban en la industria. Los inicios de esta Unión se dieron en septiembre de 1906 cuando la Unión Local de Torcedores de Arecibo No. 467 y la Unión Local de Torcedores de San Juan No. 460, unieron esfuerzos para impulsar la unificación de todos los tabaqueros bajo la Unión Internacional de los Tabaqueros de América.

Con este propósito citaron a una "Asamblea Magna de todos los tabaqueros de la Isla", reconociendo en la representación para la misma como "absolutamente libre para todos los hombres y mujeres del oficio."[26] La asamblea tuvo lugar en enero de 1907, cuando se constituyó formalmente la unión. En julio de 1908 celebró su primera asamblea regular. La segunda asamblea regular la celebraron en 1911 y en la cual hubo participación femenina. Al discutirse el tema de la mujer se presentó un informe donde se señalaba que:

> "Los nuevos tiempos nos han traído un notable cambio; la mujer acaba de dejar el hogar para ir al taller a luchar por la vida, más bien, por su subsistencia. Y la industria del tabaco, parece para ellas destino apropiado.

Hay talleres para su enseñanza y práctica; las explotan, las adiestran, y después las arrojan, por uno u otro motivo, a la calle. La cuestión es aumentar el brazo en una industria y la competencia vendrá."[27]

En otro informe de la misma asamblea se indicaba que habían dos caminos a recorrer: usar todos los medios disponibles para su organización ó, en "último extremo, si la consigna de ellas es un juramento a destruir el oficio, entonces extirpar el mal de raíz, impidiendo su aprendizaje y obra en el



oficio."[28]

En la tercera asamblea regular, celebrada en 1913, se presentó un informe donde se recogen algunas de sus preocupaciones en torno a la mujer y su presencia en la industria del tabaco. La mujer se con-vierte en un elemento crítico que puede determinar la presencia o desaparición del elemento masculino en este sector industrial. Lo que se expresa en el informe de la siguiente manera:

"Diariamente la industria es invadida por mujeres que...penetran en ella para ser explotadas sin consideración y para ser un arma de las compañías en contra nuestra por su desorganización, su educación y su debilidad. Estas compañeras de esa manera, junto a las máquinas en la elaboración...son una amenaza para todos...."[29]

Añade el informe que reconociendo la imposibilidad de impedir su entrada a esta industria y, a la misma vez, la necesidad de una organización fuerte, de intereses comunes frente al sector patronal recomiendan que:

"...deben adoptarse resoluciones fáciles y practicables para organizarlas allí en todos aquellos centros donde están trabajando...La mujer,

organizada junto a nosotros, luchando con nosotros, y preparada con nosotros, no es temible, no puede ser nuestro enemigo, al contrario, tiene que ser nuestro aliado; no puede ser débil ni dúctil, tiene que ser fuerte como nosotros, y tan resistente como nosotros."[30]

Otra argumentación que presentan para limitar o controlar la participación de la mujer en el tabaco se recoge en su preocupación por la salud de la mujer y su impacto para el futuro de la familia. Las condiciones insalubres de los talleres, la pobre alimentación y las largas jornadas de trabajo afectaban negativamente a la mujer. El impacto de esas condiciones influían en la mujer de forma tal que ésta daba "al mundo una descendencia decrépita, linfática, estúpida, inútil completamente, para las grandes concepciones del cerebro y para las grandes ejecuciones del brazo."[31]

Ciertamente que en las preocupaciones de los tabaqueros entraban unas consideraciones más allá de las puramente económicas o de trabajo. Las condiciones de empleo, de salario y de salud, que afectaban a todos por igual, no cambiarían bajo el sistema imperante. Su solución era la siguiente: "Remediemos estos males, seamos más desinteresados y propaguemos la lucha de clases."[32]

Las ideas que se desarrollan en el grupo artesanal puertorriqueño ejercieron una fuerte influencia en la mujer trabajadora, principalmente en aquellas que laboraban en la industria del tabaco o que de alguna forma estaban relacionadas con elementos de la misma. Hay tres ideas que tuvieron un fuerte impacto en ellas: el ateísmo, la idea del progreso y la importancia de la educación.[33] Un ejemplo de esas influencias se recogen en las declaraciones de la compañera de un tabaquero al expresar que:

> "Basilio me enseñó a comprender los problemas y cuando él murió me dejó con una diferente comprensión. Ya no era yo la mujer que me conformara con rezar por el alma de mi adorado. Ya no era yo la mujer que creyera en el destino o en la buena o mala suerte. Ya era la mujer que comprendía a ciencia cierta que los bandidos explotadores capitalistas habían asesinado al compañero de mi vida; que los criminales enmascarados vestidos de levita habían dejado mis hijos huérfanos y desde entonces no pensé en llorar ni en rezar para resolver mi problema...comprendí que no había otro camino que la lucha asidua y determinada por la liberación de los pueblos oprimidos en contra de su opresor. Por eso desde entonces he dedicado mi vida en Nueva York a la lucha de clase, al movimiento obrero y en particular a la defensa del pueblo de Puerto Rico y de los Puertorriqueños en Nueva York."[34]

Otro ejemplo donde se manifiesta la influencia de las ideas artesanales es en las actividades y los trabajos de Luisa Capetillo. Esta se destacó como militante obrera; en ocasiones, se desempeñó como lectora de una fábrica de tabacos y participó en huelgas de esta industria y en otros movimientos huelgarios en el país. Además, participó de diversas actividades de organización obrera, defendiendo la necesidad de integrar a la mujer al movimiento obrero. Capetillo fue una de las pocas mujeres que dejó algunos trabajos publicados en torno a los problemas de los trabajadores, las causas que los originaban y sus posibles soluciones de acuerdo a su orientación política. En ellos discute ideas tales como la importancia de la educación para los trabajadores conjuntamente con críticas a las religiones por contribuir a la ignorancia del trabajador. Además, expone su visión de la sociedad futura, donde serían abolidas las instituciones de poder tales como la iglesia y el estado. En relación a la situación de la mujer discute su falta de derechos y libertades bajo el sistema imperante. La mujer tenía que educarse como medio para libertarse de una esclavitud que la inutilizaba como mujer y como madre.[35]

Reflejo de sus acciones

La militancia que desarrollan las mujeres en las luchas del trabajo desafiaron los roles tradicionales que se les habían asignado en la sociedad puertorriqueña. Se empezaron a romper los "roles de colaboración" y al integrarse a la fuerza laboral se convirtieron en asalariadas. Ahora tuvieron que lidiar con una doble carga: la de la fábrica y la del hogar (con todas sus implicaciones). Sin embargo, en la medida en que fueron concientizándose y asumiendo posiciones de asalariadas, de esa misma forma empezaron a responder al nuevo orden establecido.

El reflejo de su actitud quedó manifestada en su participación de las campañas de organización y en los congresos obreros. Además, escribieron en los periódicos y compartieron la tribuna pública. Una de las respuestas en las cuales tuvieron una participación de gran militancia fue en los movimientos huelgarios. Una serie de factores entran en la declaración de sus huelgas y algunas de estos fueron :

- El hecho de que normalmente se les pagaban salarios más bajos que a los hombres por igual trabajo realizado.
- El hecho de que ocupaban las tareas de menor remuneración económica.
- El hecho de que sufrían de unas pésimas condiciones de trabajo que afectaban su salud y que degeneraban en enfermedades (principalmente la tuberculosis) que eventualmente las privaba de ganarse la vida y dejaba una honda huella en el seno de sus hogares.
- El hecho de que capataces y supervisores quisieran aprovecharse de su condición de mujer y de sus necesidades materiales para proponer o intentar acciones de carácter sexual o abusivos en el trato para las empleadas.
- El hecho de la solidaridad con los trabajadores varones que se declaraban en huelga. Escribía un tabaquero que las mujeres "se declaran en huelga secundando la de los torcedores, negándose a despalillar...y las demás se reúnen en grandes manifestaciones públicas para protestar de la política seguida por la casa y exhortar a aquellas camaradas para que abandonaran su trabajo y solidarizaran [a] nuestro movimiento."[36]
- En otras ocasiones, la solidaridad se practicaba con mujeres de otras fábricas de tabaco o distintos departamentos de una misma fábrica. Tal fue la situación que surgió en relación a un grupo de mujeres que trabajaba en la fábrica de N. B. Shaw y otras de La Colectiva. Las primeras se habían declarado en huelga y un grupo de ellas que caminaba cerca del edificio que ocupaba esta fábrica fue agredida por la policía.

"Al conocer el hecho las trabajadoras que hay en la fábrica de la Colectiva, que queda allí cerca, se abalanzaron a las ventanas del edificio, y desde allí, empezaron a tirar chavetas, mesas de elaboración de tabacos, tubos de hierro, y piedra, sobre la policía...Con tal motivo, las obreras de la Colectiva se han declarado en huelga uniéndose a sus compañeras de la fábrica de Mr. Shaw."[37]

- El hecho de la necesidad de unos aumentos de salarios para hacerle frente al alto costo de la vida y participar mínimamente de las altas ganancias que estaba obteniendo la industria del tabaco en Puerto Rico.

Durante la década de 1920 se dieron una serie de circunstancias que afectaron a la industria del tabaco en el país y que, a la misma vez, definieron su rumbo final. Entre ellas encontramos la desastrosa caída que tuvo PRATCO por motivo de la baja en los precios en el mercado de tabaco y la disminución en la demanda por sus productos. Este se definió como un periodo donde la mujer dejó claramente establecido su predominio en la industria. Estrechamente relacionado con lo anterior fue la intensificación de la mecanización que ocurrió en la industria, tanto de cigarrillos como de cigarros. Con ello vino el paulatino desplazamiento del hombre por la mujer. La competencia del cigarrillo se intensificó amenazando a la industria del cigarro con su total desaparición.

En este periodo tomó un gran auge el despalillado del tabaco. No tan sólo se despalillará el tabaco cosechado en Puerto Rico sino que se importaba tabaco para despalillarlo en el país. Ese mismo tabaco posteriormente se vendía como tabaco puertorriqueño. De esta forma se establece todo un negocio de exportación de tabaco despalillado. Más importante aún, se usó preferentemente la mano de obra de la mujer en esta tarea. Otro elemento influyente fue la Ley de Salario Mínimo para las mujeres, aprobada por la legislatura puertorriqueña en 1919. Por cierto, la validez de esta ley se puso a prueba precisamente con un caso relacionado con el despalillado.

El espectro de la emigración continuó presente y para el sector de los tabaqueros, hombres y mujeres, se convirtió en una salida a su situación económica. Mujeres como Consuelo Marcial tomaron este camino y sus esfuerzos dejaron su huella en Nueva York. Sobre el tema de emigración editorializaba *Unión Obrera* señalando que: "El concepto de patria se va perdiendo en este país y de ello nos alegramos, pues la unidad de la patria, que es el hogar, es el universo y que hay que buscar la patria donde las necesidades estén cubiertas."[38] ❑

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END NOTES

1 La mayor parte de los escritos sobre la mujer puertorriqueña aunque reconocen su importancia mayormente hacen mención de la mujer en el tabaco y han concentrado los estudios en la mujer que trabajaba en la costura. Al respecto, véase los trabajos de Yamila Azize *La mujer en la lucha*, Río Piedras, P.R.: Editorial Cultural, 1985 y y *La mujer en Puerto Rico: ensayos de investigación*, Río Piedras, P.R.: Ediciones Huracán, 1987. Uno de los pocos trabajos en el que se le dedican varias páginas a la mujer en el tabaco es el ensayo de Angel G. Quintero Rivera, "Socialista y tabaquero: la proletarización de los artesanos." *Sin Nombre*, 8, 4 (1978 enero-marzo): 111–117.

2 Bailey W. and Justine Whitfield Diffie, *Porto Rico: A Broken Pledge*, New York: Vanguard Press, 1931, pp. 46–50.

3 Ibid., p. 78.

4 Ibid., p.89.

5 Ibid., p. 90.

6 "In 1900 the combination had 62 percent of the national output of plug tobacco and 59.2 percent of the output of smoking tobacco; in 1901, the first full year of the American Snuff Company, it had 80.2 percent of the output of snuff. In 1897 the American Tobacco Company had controlled barely a fifth of any one of these products. The combination, moreover, still retained substantially a monopoly control over the cigarette business, making 92.7 percent of the national output in 1900." William Z. Ripley, *Trusts, Pools and Corporations*, Boston: Ginn and Company, 1916, p. 275.

7 Ray Ginger, *Age of Excess: The United States From 1877 to 1914*, New York: MacMillan Company, p. 30.

8 *Bureau of Insular Affairs Guide*, Reel I, doc. # 70. Aquí aparece una traducción al inglés de un editorial originalmente publicado en *El Heraldo Español*, con fecha del 6 de febrero de 1908.

9 Diffie, op. cit., pp. 92–93.

10 Reavis Cox, *Competition in the American Tobacco Industry, 1911–1932*, New York: AMS Press, 1968, p. 88.

11 Charles E. Gage, *The Tobacco Industry in Puerto Rico*, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Circular No. 519, March 1939, p. 44.

12 Véase nota 102 en el libro de James L. Dietz, *Economy History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 117.

13 Lo que quedó de ese artesanado produciendo en casas particulares o en chinchales tenían que competir en desventaja con la producción masiva de la fábrica. Para vender su producto tenían que hacerlo a precios menores y en forma ilegal. A los efectos, las autoridades estatales desataron una persecución de aquellos que elaboraban cigarros sin el debido procedimiento de ley y del pago de estampillas de Rentas Internas.

14 Geo. W. Davis, *Report on Civil Affairs of Puerto Rico*, 1899, Washington, D.C.: GOP, 1900, p. 306. Aquí se señala que después de la plantación, las mujeres y los niños realizaban los trabajos necesarios.

15 Ayuda en el cultivo de subsistencia, crianza de animales domésticos, algunas tareas agrícolas secundarias en las haciendas, colaboración en periodos estacionales de amplia necesidad de mano de obra. Véase Angel G. Quintero, op. cit., p. 112. Sin embargo, sospechamos que la participación de la mujer era mucho más activa en el sector agrícola, especialmente en el café y el tabaco.

16 "Encargada de extraer a mano el palote o vena central de la hoja de tabaco y de clasificar la misma según su color, textura y tamaño." Veáse Puerto Rico, Dept. del Trabajo, Despalillado de tabaco, 1956, p. 5.

17 Citado en Patricia Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker. Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900–1919*, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987, p. 162.

18 Edith Abbott, *Women in Industry. A Study in American Economic History*, New York: Appleton and Company, 1910, pp. 205–206. En este trabajo se indica que la industria del tabaco en Estados Unidos habia sido en un principio una industria de la mujer pero fueron eventualmente desplazadas por hombres, principalmente emigrantes. Después de 1870 su número en la industria volvió a aumentar por motivo de el aumento en la emigración de Bohemia donde las mujeres trabajaban exclusivamente en las fábricas de cigarros; por la invención de maquinaria que podia ser manejada por mujeres; por la opinión de los patronos en cuanto a que la mujer era más "dócil" que el hombre y, por lo tanto, menos propensa al movimiento huelgario (p. 196).

19 Se publicaron originalmente en *Ensayo Obrero*, 1ro. de junio de 1897. Aparecen citados en Santiago Iglesias, *Luchas Emancipadoras*, Tomo I, p. 93.

20 Federación Libre de los Trabajadores de Puerto Rico. *Reglamiento de la Federación Libre de los Trabajadores de Puerto Rico*. San Juan, P.R., 1903, p. 1.

21 Véase Federación Libre de Trabajadores de Puerto Rico, *Reporte de procedimientos del tercer Congreso de la Federación Libre de los Trabajadores de Puerto Rico*, Mayagüez, P.R.: Imprenta Unión Obrera, 1905.

22 Federación Libre de los Trabajadores de Puerto Rico, *Procedimientos del Sexto Congreso Obrero de la Federación Libre de los Trabajadores de Puerto Rico*, San Juan, P.R.: Tip. Murillo, 1910, p. 150.

23 Ibid., pp. iii-iv.

24 Ibid., p. 66.

25 Ibid., p. 65.

26 Hoja Suelta, 15 de septiembre de 1906. Micropelicula periódicos obreros. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños.

27 Federación Libre de los Trabajadores de Puerto Rico, *Actuaciones de la Segunda y Tercera Asambleas Regulares de las Uniones de Tabaqueros de Puerto Rico*, San Juan, P.R.: Porto Rico Progress Publishing Co., 1914, p. 51.

28 Ibid., pp. 63–64 (de la Segunda Asamblea).

29 Tercera Asamblea, op. cit. p. 48.

30 Ibid., p. 49.

31 Ibid., pp. 80–81.

32 Ibid., p. 81.

33 Véase ensayo de Angel G. Quintero Rivera, "Socialista y tabaquero...," op. cit.

34 Consuelo Marcial, "Desde mi Bella Patria Puertorriqueña" *Pueblos Hispanos*, Nueva York, 9 de septiembre de 1944, p. 6. Ya para 1908 la encontramos haciendo un llamado a los torcedores no organizados para que unieran a la "Unión Internacional". Véase *El Eco del Torcedor*, 7 de noviembre de 1908.

35 Luisa Capetillo, Ensayos Libertarios, Arecibo, P.R.: Imprenta *Unión Obrera*, 1907; *La humanidad en el futuro*, San Juan, P.R.: Tip. Real Hermanos, 1910; Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer, San Juan, P.R.: The Times Pub., 1911; Influencia de las ideas modernas, San Juan, P.R.: Tip. Negrón Flores, 1916.

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37 *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, 29 de agosto de 1918, p. 1.

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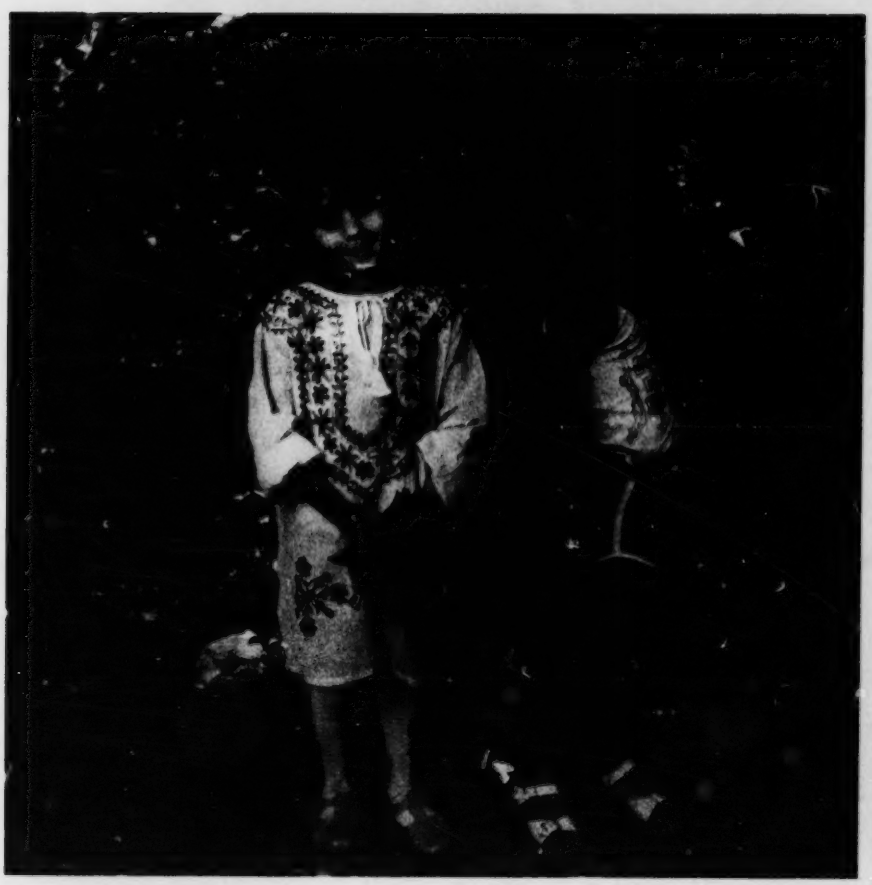

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PORTFOLIO

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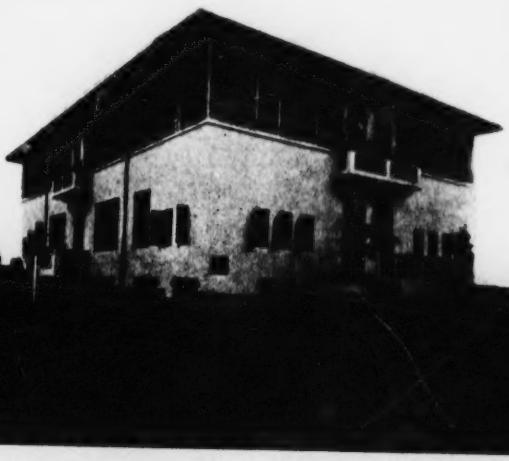
The Needlework Industry of Puerto Rico



The establishment of Miss Maria Luisa Arcelay in Mayaguez

Women's Labor and the Domestic Unit:
Industrial Homework in Puerto Rico During the 1930s

María del Carmen Baerga

The purpose of this article is to examine the counterpoint of class and gender among working class women in Puerto Rico during the decade of the 1930s. Any study of women's waged labor in Puerto Rico cannot escape the fact that women in general have been responsible for the bulk of unpaid work realized within the domestic unit. For this reason, women have found it difficult to participate in the paid labor force, and even when they do, their participation has conformed to the hierarchies of age and gender, organized at the level of the domestic unit through "family" relations. As a result, their work experiences are shaped, not only by their class situation, but also by their gender and age.

Many feminists have linked the subordination of women to social relations structured within the context of the family through two processes. The first process is the division of labor along gender lines within the domestic unit, especially the relegation of women to unpaid "reproductive" tasks. The second process is socialization, through which children internalize masculine or feminine attributes and attitudes according to their sex (Nakano Glenn, 1989:357). This line of analysis has led many to advocate, if not the abolition of the family, then at least the incorporation of women into the paid labor force and an enlightened education as a means of favoring their liberation.

Nevertheless, during the difficult decade of the 1930s in Puerto Rico, women's activities, paid and unpaid, were crucial for the survival of the working class as a whole. Women worked and struggled to improve the condition of the working class, but most often in the context of the domestic unit. It was precisely during this decade that women expanded their paid activities in the needlework industry, which used primarily home-workers. As we shall see, this mode of organizing production not only led to the superexploitation of women, it also recreated women's subordinate position within the domestic unit. This paper will demonstrate, then, that women's unpaid work was essential for the reproduction of the working class, of which women were a part, and that the incorporation of women into the paid labor force was shaped by their unpaid responsibilities and even reinforced this basic division of labor

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by gender. We need to understand these contradictory situations in order to formulate lessons for the future.

Women's Work and the Survival of the Working Class

Throughout the nineteenth century, the basic unit of commercial agricultural production had been the ***hacienda***, where workers received at least a portion of their wages in kind and were granted a small plot of land to set up a house and grow the basic staples necesary for the family's subsistence. The gradual expansion of the export economy obliged many peasants to become sharecroppers or laborers living on hacienda property.

The twentieth century, however, opened with a series of political and economic transformations which accelerated the proletarianization of the countryside. Shortly after the North American invasion of 1898, the bulk of arable coastal lands were turned over to sugar cultivation under the control of modern sugar mills (*centrales*). The sugar industry soon eclipsed other agricultural activities and the hacienda system quickly collapsed. As a result, thousands of agricultral laborers lost access to subsistence plots and began to seek wages in the sugar industry and urban areas.

The sugar industry employed predominantly male workers. It did not have fixed wages and frequently hired workers by the task, depending on the size of the plantation, the location, and the type of work (Silvestrini, 1979:65). The industry was seasonal, providing work for only five and half months of the year. During the off season almost everybody was unemployed. This created a very serious situation for the masses of workers on the Island for whom the industry represented the main source of employment.

Coffee and citrus were still produced in Puerto Rico, though on a much smaller scale than sugar. Tobacco was both cultivated and manufactured into cigars on the Island. These were also seasonal crops, and wages were even lower than in the sugar industry. Male workers often migrated to the coastal sugar fields and then returned to the highlands during the off season to work in coffee and tobacco.

The tobacco industry had a considerable impact on the labor structure since it incorporated, for the first time, thousands of women into the renumerated labor force. Women participated in the manufacuring phase, mainly as tobacco strippers. The industry reached its highest export rates in 1922, however, this prosperity was short lived and by the 1930s the market for cigars had shrunk considerably. The main reason for this decline was the competition with American-made cigarettes.

The needlework industry was among the newly established industries in Puerto Rico, and by the 1930s had become the leading source of female employment. It began to export on a large scale in the context of World War I. During and after the war it became very difficult for the New York and other East coast department stores to obtain sufficient quantities of needlework from the usual sources. Although some work was done in factories, the industry was characterized by the utilitzation of homework as the principal means of organizing production. The work reached the worker through a very complicated chain of intermediaries (U.S. investor—contractor—agent—sub-agent—worker). The piece rate system that predominated in the industry fostered a long chain of exploitation. Increases in the demand could only be met by reaching more workers, forcing contractors to sub-contract agents in order to achieve a wider distribution of the work (Baerga, 1987).

By the turn of the century, there was a tendency towards the increased monetarization of the economy. Some evidence suggests that an intensification of cash-producing activities took place. Women, for example, raised vegetables, fruits, and

poultry, and made sweets which were later peddled by the children. Many households kept chickens obtaining some cash from the selling of eggs. This was a source from which money for groceries was largely derived (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1901:396).

This trend was accelerated during the first decades of the twentieth century, when incomes from wages became increasingly important for workers' survival. The basic staples of the Puerto Rican diet, like rice, beans and codfish, were imported. Nominal wages doubled, and in some cases tripled, during the 1898–1920 period. Nonetheless, such increases were cancelled out by the tremendous increase in the prices of basic necessities. According to Pérez (1984), real wages actually declined during this period. Under these conditions the reproduction of the working class household was significantly changed, as they were now submitted to the low wages and unemployment of the new industries, but with little or no access to the means of producing subsistence, the land (Parker Hanson, 1955:31).

The economic situation compelled other members of the working class household to look for wage work in the newly established industries (Baerga, 1984). Besides the male head and their sons, women started to join the labor force. Women's employment increased 61.2% during the 1899–1910 period (Rivera, 1979:11). Most of these female workers were concentrated in the tobacco industry. In 1899 only 1.6% of the tobacco labor was constituted by women. This figure increased to 27.8% by 1910 and to 52.9% by 1920 (Quintero, 1982:76)

According to one study (Picó, 1986), female tobacco workers tended to be younger, single, and had less children than other working women (launderesses, cooks and ironers). Nearly 22% of the tobacco workers were heads of households while 58.4% of them belonged to households headed by females. Close to 39% were daughters of the head of the household. These data suggest that the first ones who went out to work for a wage and left the domestic sphere were mainly daughters that belonged, in many cases, to female-headed households. Similarly, female heads of households also had a significant presence among those who went to work outside the home for a wage.

Most married women, however, stayed at home performing domestic tasks, taking care of domestic animals and the house garden. Seven out of every 10 rural workers, aside from those who lived in the sugar centrales where there was no land available at all, had house gardens. However, these consisted of two or three plantain or banana plants, some tubers and various medicinal herbs. Gardens were poorly cultivated and produced one third of their potential. Households did not have the means to buy seeds and tools. Also, most workers were reluctant to invest their time or labor in improvements to the land because they did not own it and could have been removed from it at any time (P.R. Dept. del Trabajo, 1914:91).

Both sugar and tobacco production confronted serious problems during the 1920s. While the tobacco industry lost a considerable part of its market to American-made cigarettes, sugar prices in the international market started to decline since the beginning of the 1920s, but the industry maintained a high rate of profit until the mid-thirties. This expansion was attained largely through protectionist measures on the part of the U.S. (Pantojas, 1985).

The economic crisis of the 1930s meant unemployment for thousands of Puerto Ricans. By 1929, more than 170,000 people were out of work, excluding housewives, children under 18 years of age, and the handicapped (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1930). Between 1930 and 1940, the Island's population grew by 25% while the number of jobs increased by 1.7% (Rivera, 1980). In 1938, the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) estimated the number of unemployed at 1,121,035 (Quintero, 1980:54). Male participation in the labor force (14 years or older)

decreased from 93.7% in 1910, to 79.4% in 1940. However, as the rate of male salaried employment decreased, the rate for female participation in the paid labor force actually increased, reaching unprecedented levels during the 1930s (Baerga, 1984).

The great majority of the new arrivals to the work force were married women. While the proportion of single women in the labor force decreased slightly between 1920 and 1935, the percentage of married women increased by 23%. In absolute numbers, the total of married women in the labor force doubled during this 15-year period (U.S. Census, 1920; U.S. Census, 1930; PRRA, 1938). This massive entrance of married women into the labor force in the 1920s and 30s was due to the expansion of the needlework industry, which quickly became the principal source of female employment. This was particularly the case during the 1930s, when needlework exports reached an unprecedented high (Zeluck, 1952).

Unlike the tobacco industry, the needlework industry predominantly utilized homeworkers. This allowed many women to reconcile their domestic responsibilities with wage work, thus providing the household a much needed cash income during the agricultural dead season. A study of the activities of mothers in rural Puerto Rico conducted in 1933 showed that their opportunities to earn money were extremely limited and usually restricted to the domestic sphere. The most common activities among the women surveyed were serving meals to boarders and laundering, in addition to sewing clothes and needlework (P.R. Dept. Instrucción Pública, 1934:50).

The cash income from homework made by thousands of women was of crucial importance for the survival of the domestic unit and, by extension, of the working class as a whole. A study undertaken in 1933 revealed that 58% of more than 100 wage earning households had obtained their incomes exclusively from needlework during the week prior to the interviews, which were carried out during the off season

in the sugar industry (Manning, 1934).

This arrangement, in which household members pooled their incomes, provided one of the foundations of the colonial economy in general. While men worked outside the home in agriculture, women were, first and foremost, responsible for reproductive work at home. They viewed their waged needlework as a task that could be undertaken literally alongside their domestic chores. They considered their wages as something "extra" during periods of economic duress, as a complement to supposed "primary" income of the male head of household. In many cases, however, the only income among working class households during the off season in agriculture was the few cents a day earned by women needleworkers. By assuming the responsibility for the necessary unremunerated work at home and in the community, women garanteed that their menfolk were able to report for work when it became available. Their unpaid work supported, "free of charge," the low male wages in the various industries on the Island.

This reconstruction of our recent history suggests that the activities of a person within the division of labor in the domestic context shapes their participation in the waged labor force. In the case of homeworkers, their principal responsibility was unpaid domestic work which shaped their participation in the paid labor force. Likewise, a study done in the United States in 1934 found that 90% of homeworkers surveyed considered themselves to be "housewives" and actually preferred homework because it permitted them to fulfill their domestic duties (Boris, 1985). This phenomenon is mentioned frequently in the literature about industrial homework.

Furthermore, female participation in paid labor outside the home depended upon the presence of other women to take care of domestic work. As previously mentioned, the majority of the women who initially entered the labor force in the tobacco industry were daughters, followed by female heads of households. They were in an entirely different position within the domestic unit than married women.

A survey of mothers employed outside the home in 1942 (primarily in needlework factories or laundries) found that grandmothers, followed by aunts or other female relatives, usually took care of the children during the day. Only occasionally did unemployed fathers take this responsibility and even in these few cases the men depended upon "other persons" (most certainly women) to prepare food for the children or purchased their meals. Another, last resort, option was to simply leave the children alone, since only a very few could afford nurseries or paid domestic help (P.R. Dept. of Labor, 1942). In contrast to these various arrangements made by women employed outside the home, homeworkers were able to combine and integrate their primary domestic duties with waged labor. This arrangement greatly facilitated the participation of women with heavy domestic responsibilities.

One observes a fairly consistent pattern of female employment throughout various phases of industrial capitalism. On the one hand, the women located in labor intensive production outside the home have been primarily young, single and with no, or very few, children (Nash, 1983; Safa, 1982). Only in the absence of a male provider do mothers usually participate in factory work (Fernández-Kelly, 1983). On the other hand, homeworkers are usually married women (frequently with children), "housewives" that manage to integrate waged and unwaged activities. In other words, women with heavy domestic responsibilities are not likely to participate in wage labor outside the home unless domestic chores can be reassigned to other women, reorganized or reduced.

The Implications of Homework

It is clear that when it comes to joining the ranks of the paid labor force, women's options are shaped by their position within the domestic unit, especially with respect to their gender, life cycle, and civil status. In addition, ideological factors help define which kinds of jobs are appropriate for and available to women. Industrial enterprises, in their search for labor "bargains," take advantage of these gender-based inequalities, which devalue women's labor with respect to men's labor. Furthermore, by consistently paying women less and by converting the home into a workplace for manufacture, these enterprises also create and reproduce gender inequalities.

Industrial homework is based on the premise that a woman's place is in the home. Far from representing a vehicle for bettering her social and economic situation, the typical conditions in industrial homework place women in a quite vulnerable position, both with respect to capital and with respect to male family members. The fact that this arrangement allows for women to simultaneously perform paid and unpaid activities supports low wages and sporadic employment.

Homework gives the false impression that the woman controls her time, that she is spared the hardship of continuous factory work and that she avoids the harrassment of male supervisors. In fact, it ties the worker to the reproductive tasks in the household and reinforces her dependency on male wage labor. In this way, it deepens the hierarchical structure of the domestic unit and reproduces women's subordinate position in society at large.

One of the lessons derived from the study of women's work experiences in the past is the knowledge that women's integration into the paid labor force does not automatically mean an improvement in their social position. The means and conditions under which they are integrated are key factors in determining their actual bargaining power within and without the domestic unit. Moreover, in order to assure the survivial of the working class household, especially in periods of crisis, women are compelled to work under conditions that reproduce and deepen gender inequalities in society. We need to reflect upon these issues because the most fundamental characteristics of women's work, paid and unpaid, have been quite persistent to this day. Indeed, homework as a form of organizing production has expanded in recent years.

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The Lives of Pioneras:
Bibliographic and Research Sources on Puerto Rican Women in the United States

Altagracia Ortiz

In recent years academic and literary circles in the United States have seen the emergence of an increasing number of sources on Puerto Rican women in this country.[1] Many of these sources already have been published, but there is a body of information, consisting mainly of unpublished doctoral dissertations, papers, and pamphlets not yet in print that can be of value to researchers in the field of Puerto Rican women's studies.

Written from different perspectives and encompassing a variety of styles, this literature has attempted to record the unique experiences of women who migrated to the United States from Puerto Rico, or who were born in the United States of Puerto Rican parentage but identify themselves as *puertorriqueñas*. Efforts in the area of biography, oral history, and personal narratives, for example, have produced accounts of individual Puerto Rican women's lives that illuminate their specific contributions to the development of Hispanic communities in the United States.[2] A vast social science literature, in the meantime, has given us the anonymous or "collective experiences of Puerto Rican women that reveal aspects of their personal and working lives, while the creative literary collections and criticism of Puerto Rican women writers explore the inner spirit, longings, and reflections of women who have left in their poetry, novels, and essays intimate images of their struggles in this country. Likewise, insights of Puerto Rican feminists have contributed unique perceptions that allow for a glimpse at Hispanic women's changing attitudes and values as their lives enfold in this country.

Although archival sources are difficult to locate, these materials are also of interest to scholars, for, in some areas, they provide raw data that can be utilized in much-needed research on Puerto Rican women's studies. Identification and classification of these sources has become an increasingly important task because of the need within the Hispanic communities to reclaim a more gender-balanced past and to create an environment where women's contributions are more appreciated. Also, feminist scholars have an interest in studying the diversity and complexity of the female experience in America. It is in light of these needs that this bibliographic essay is written.

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This article is the first section of a three-part study of bibliographic sources covering Puerto Rican women in the United States.[3] The sources discussed in this section consist mainly of short biographies or biographical sketches that are part of larger works or articles on Puerto Rican women in the United States. Most of the biographical vignettes discussed here tell the lifestory of women who emigrated to New York City form Puerto Rico during the first period of the Island's migration period, a time-span that covers the years from the 1890s to the early 1940s. The emergence of these biographies in the last 25 years may be traced in part to the interest in the ethnic studies of the 1970s decade, but most specially to the influence of feminism and women's studies within the community of Puerto Rican scholars.

Biography, Oral History and Personal Narrative

Biographical accounts of individual Puerto Rican women, in the form of traditional biography and more recent studies in oral history and personal narrative, constitute an important element of the historical documentation of Puerto Ricans in the United States. Through these different personal life stories, a partial reconstruction of the origins and development of the first Puerto Rican settlements in this country is possible. They clearly establish the continuously active participation of women in the creation of these communities.

Biographical vignettes such as those of Lola Rodríguez de Tío by Carmen Leila Cuevas (1969), Carlos F. Mendoza Tío (1975), and Federico Ribes Tovar (1972,1976), record the life of one of the first women to migrate to New York City on the eve of the twentieth century, just before the Puerto Rican community began to take shape.[4] These works note that Rodríguez de Tió, a leading poet forced into exile in 1892 because of her anti-colonialist stance against Spain, ardently worked among Cuban and Puerto Rican revolutionaries in New York City advocating the cause of freedom and national liberation for Puerto Rico and Cuba. She also enhanced the cultural life of the nascent Hispanic community by reciting poetry and playing piano in concerts. Rodríguez de Tió resided in the city for an extremely short period of time, but her literary and political influences are still felt in the Puerto Rican community in the United States.[5]

Additional biographical works document the activities of other illustrious Puerto Rican women who visited and briefly worked in the United States during the first decades of the twentieth century. Norma Valle Ferrer's 1975 biography of Luisa Capetillo is sketchy in its description of the life of this famous socialist labor organizer and radical feminist in the United States, but it does mention that Capetillo continued to write on behalf of the rights of women and workers in New York City and in Florida during her 1912–1913 stay in this country.[6] The visits and temporary work experiences of a young Felisa Rincón Marrero de Gautier, who later became mayor of San Juan, are recounted by Ruth Gruber in a biography written for young readers. Gruber's account of Rincón de Gautier's visits to New York during the 1930s places her in garment shops, sometimes as a seamstress, sometimes as a buyer. Rincón de Gautier wished to learn about the dressmaking and hat industries in order to open up her own "style shop" in San Juan. According to Gruber, Rincón de Gautier's experiences in New York City's garment center apparently paid-off, because she eventually established a successful dress store in the Island's capital.[7]

Felisa Rincón de Gautier is the focus of a section entitled "Four Outstanding Women" in Ribes Tovar's work on Puerto Rican women. Ribes Tovar's mini-biography describes Rincón de Gautier as a cutter in a fashionable Fifth Avenue shop, who saved a "little money" and returned

home to open up a "fashion shop!" Ribes Tovar informs us that later, as ex-mayor of San Juan Rincón de Gautier, visited New York City to support the demands of the Puerto Rican community, and was considered a very popular figure by puertorriqueños in the city.[8]

The biographies of these temporary residents are important, but those of women settled permanently in New York City during these years truly are historical prisms through which the cultural, social, and political developments of the Puerto Rican people in this area can be traced. For instance, the life histories of Pura Belpré, the first Puerto Rican woman to work in the city's public library system, indicate that already by the 1920s, 30s and 40s there existed a Hispanic community desirous of cultural and intellectual activities.[9]

Published biographical sketches of Belpré may be found in *Contemporary Authors* (1978), *Authors of Books for Young People* (1971), *Fourth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators* (1978), and in an article by Virginia Sánchez-Korrol.[10] But, the most detailed account of her life and work in New York is the oral history prepared by Lillian López, another Puerto Rican librarian, for the Columbia University Oral History Project.[11] This oral history is based on two lengthy interviews conducted on February 14, 1976 and April 4, 1976, and gives a detailed description of Belpré's early years in Puerto Rico, her sojourn to New York City, her work as librarian and story-teller, and her marriage to Clarence Cameron White, a North American Black musician and composer.

Belpré began working for the New York Public Library in 1921 in what today is the Countee Cullen Library, and moved on to the Seward Park and East Harlem Aguilar Branches in 1926 and 1929 respectively. At these libraries Belpré mounted children's programs that focused on stories and tales, an interest that later led her to the translation and publication of traditional Puerto Rican folk tales, such as *Pérez y Martina* and other children's stories.[12] For her story-telling sessions in schools and libraries, she devised colorful puppet shows that many years later served as the model for the Puppet theater of the South Bronx Project, a bilingual educational program which she initiated with Lillian López. The close relationship that these two creative and caring librarians developed in later years is manifested in an essay which brings together their personal narratives about their experiences in different libraries throughout New York City and in the Puerto Rican community.[13] Belpré gives a short version of the oral history she later passed on to López for the Columbia University project. López' narrative, going back to 1935 when she first came here with her mother and sister, is an intimate look at how she came to be a librarian.[14] In these brief autobiographies, Belpré and López emerge as diligent students, dedicated professionals, and active community leaders, who helped organize various programs that preserved the cultural heritage of the Hispanic people and expanded their intellectual horizons.

Biographies of other migrant women attest to the continued involvement of Puerto Rican women in the establishment of a cultural *ambiente* or ambience within Hispanic society in New York City. The biography of Josefina Silva de Cintrón by Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, for example, describes the life of a well-educated, middle-class Puerto Rican woman who enriched the cultural and social life of Hispanics in this city by her active participation in some of the organizations of the time, such as *Unión de Mujeres Americanas* (American Women's Union) and the League of Spanish-speaking Democrats, and by the creation of a literary journal, *Artes y Letras* (Arts and Letters) that appeared monthly in New York City from 1933 to 1945.[15] The primary function of this publication was to encourage the preservation of the Spanish language and culture, and disseminate information on events of interest to Hispanics

in the city. The journal was particularly interested in issues of concern to Latin American women, and published articles on women's conferences and achievements, facts about children and the family, and on social events that appealed to women. In addition, *Artes y Letras* encouraged the production of creative literature among Hispanic women by publishing, from time to time, the works of these writers.

One of these women was Julia de Burgos, a poet and teacher, who had begun to establish a reputation for herself in Puerto Rico's literary circles before she came to the United States in 1940. Julia de Burgos' life in New York was short and tragic, but the biographies of this great poet convey a sense of the creative potential of which the Puerto Rican people are capable—even during moments of oppression and depression—in this country. The first, and most complete of these biographies is Yvette Jiménez de Báez' *Julia de Burgos, vida y poesía* (1966), although this work is also an analysis of Burgos' poetry.[16]

With meticulous care, Jiménez de Báez presents the richness of Burgos' literary productions as well as details of her personal life—a life which began in the Island's rural countryside and rose to brilliance as a young poet and teacher in Puerto Rico, only to suffer the debilitating effects of alcoholism and neglect in New York City. Recent scholarly works on Julia de Burgos retell the dramatic and sad story of her life in this city, but concentrate on providing analyses on the nationalist and feminist tendencies in her writings.[17] Collections of Burgos' poems contain short descriptions of her stay in New York.[18] She first arrived in 1940, but left for Cuba before the year was out, returning once again in 1946. In spite of the illness that consumed her body, Burgos continued to write, and found energy to participate in the cultural life of the Puerto Rican community of the late 1940s.[19] Her struggle to survive in an alienating environment, and the uplifting messages in her poetry have become symbols of strength for Puerto Rican nation on the Island and in the United States.[20] She is considered the most universal of all Puerto Rican female poets by Ribes Tovar, who includes her among the "outstanding" women in his collection of biographies.[21]

The oral histories of Carmela Antonia Marrero Zapata, the first Roman Catholic nun to serve in the United States from Puerto Rico and of Leoncia Rosado Rousseau and Aimee García Cortese, both leading Protestant ministers in the Puerto Rican community, are historical sources that delineate part of the social evolution of their people in this country.

Marrero Zapata, endearingly called Sister Carmelita by all who knew her, was interviewed by Pedro Rivera and Tomás Rivera on May 12, 1973 for the Long Island Historical Society Project (today the Brooklyn Historical Society Project). This was an effort to preserve the history of the first Puerto Rican settlers who came to the borough of Brooklyn in the 1920s and 1930s.[22] Sánchez-Korrol also has prepared two short biographies on Sister Carmelita, which highlight the devotion of this religious woman to her church and convent, her personal interest in pursuing a higher education, and her unwavering commitment to the welfare of the Puerto Rican communities in New York City.[23] Sister Carmelita's importance to the Puerto Rican people likewise has been recognized by Ribes Tovar; he included her life story among his biographies of outstanding Puerto Rican women who had "striven and triumphed" in harsh environments.[24]

Oral interviews of Leoncia Rosado Rousseau and Aimee García Cortese by Sánchez-Korrol and Benjamín Alicea in 1985, led to biographical studies that create a link between the early Puerto Rican settlements established in the 1920s and 1930s and the rise of this community in the United States after World War II.[25] Reverend Leoncia, or Leo, as she is called by her followers, came to the United States in 1935, convinced that she had been chosen for

an evangelical life in the Protestant Church. Her prophecy came true when her husband, Roberto, was drafted by the United States armed forces during the second World War, and she succeeded him as the new pastor of the Damascus Church in the Bronx, the church in which they worshipped. As part of her ministry, Rosado Rousseau established programs for the rehabilitation of drug addicts, ex-convicts, and gang members, programs which began to deal successfully with some of the more serious problems that affected the Puerto Rican community at the time. The life story of Rosado Rousseau, thus, was tied to the early migration experiences and events in the Puerto Rican community in later years.

The biography of García Cortese is a story that connects different generations of Puerto Rican in the United States. Born in 1929 in the South Bronx, García Cortese was inspired by Rosado Rousseau and earlier missionaries to pursue the Christian calling, and since the 1960s has helped mobilize the youth in her congregations because she believes this is part of the work of the church. The biographies of these religious women reveal the continuing commitment of spiritual leaders to the progress of the Puerto Rican nation in the United States.

Another woman whose life story is an example of intense dedication to the ideals of the Puerto Rican nation in this country is that of Dolores Lebrón Soto, more popularly known as Lolita Lebrón. Lebrón's life,the subject of Ribas Tovar's work, *Lolita Lebrón, la prisionera* (1974), is similar to Burgos in its glory and its tragedy. Ribes Tovar follows her story from humble beginnings in Lares, Puerto Rico, to her emigration to New York City in 1940. This was followed by political involvement with the Nationalist Party of Pedro Albizu Campos after 1947, that culminated with the shooting in 1954 of five representatives of the United States Congress. The rest of the biography discusses her trial, her lifelong imprisonment in the women's penitentiary in Anderson, Virginia, and her revolutionary ideology.[26] While in prison, Lebrón wrote a collection of poems, and we find in her poetry not only her political ideas and acts but also her personal reflections and thought.[27] Lebrón's poetic activities were not as prolific as Burgos', but certainly her lengthy imprisonment was just as tragic as Burgos' untimely death. And, for young Puerto Rican writers, such as Sandra María Esteves, Lebrón is a feminist warrior-poet, who "echoes" the social conscience of the Puerto Rican people in the United States.[28]

Biographies, oral histories, and personal narratives of individual Puerto Ricans are historical source materials that can document trends in the history of Puerto Ricans in this country. As noted earlier, most of the biographical studies or life stories published so far have focused on the activities of early migrant women who came to the United States during the first decades of the twentieth century.[29] The individual accounts of these women's lives indicate that the Puerto Rican community in the United States is much older than people have imagined; more importantly, these narratives document the dedication and involvement of women to the development of this community.

The biographies of Lola Rodríguez de Tío and Julia de Burgos, for instance, show that women helped preserve the Hispanic culture and raise the intellectual consciousness of the new Puerto Rican society in North America, while the narratives of the lives of women like Pura Belpré and Josefina Cintrón are clear statements of women's function as a stabilizing force in the first Puerto Rican settlements in New York City. Through their work, these women were able to impart a sense of dignity and belonging to the people of this young community. Meanwhile, the personal stories of religious women, such as Sister Carmelita, and the Reverends Leoncia Rousseau and Aimee García Cortese, serve as examples of the humanitarian

spirit that exists within the Puerto Rican people. And, in the life of someone like Lolita Lebrón we see reflected the longing for independence and nationhood that many Puerto Ricans in the United States feel for their Island. These life histories, thus, are part of the reality of the Puerto Rican nation in this country; as such, they reveal the sorrows and joys of a people adjusting to new—sometimes hostile—environment. It is important that we continue to study the lives of individual women because their biographies or oral histories can serve as microcosms for understanding the larger community of Puerto Rican people in the United States.

ENDNOTES

1 I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Eileen Rowland and Peggy Perrin of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Library for their constant support and good friendship, and to the rest of the college library staff, most especially to Marvie Brooks, for their steady endeavors in locating material for me. I am equally grateful to the staff of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Library, Hunter College, City University of New York for their patience, diligent work and excellent counsel.

2 For further information on this topic see Altagracia Ortiz, "The Role of Women in the History of the Puerto Rican Community in the United States: An Essay on Research Sources and Trends," paper prsented at the Fifth Annual New Jersey Research Conference on Women, Douglass College of the State University of New Jersey (May 19, 1987), pp. 1-16. A copy of this paper may be found in the vertical files of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College, CUNY.

3 Part two will concentrate on a thorough analysis of the social literature that has appeared since the 1950s to the present and has exclusively dealt with the family roles of Puerto Rican women: the physical health studies, especially those dealing with the controversy over sterilization and other birth-control programs among Puerto Rican women; the psychological health problems of a segment of this population; the labor studies of the Puerto Rican female work experiences; and with social science profiles that investigate Puerto Rican women's relationship to age, sex, race, education, and their community. The last part of this study will attempt to evaluate the literary and scholarly endeavors of Puerto Rican women themselves. A complete version of this article may be requested by writing to Altagracia Ortiz at 54 Second Avenue, Brentwood, N.Y. 11717.

4 Carmen Leila Cuevas, *Lola de América* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Ramallo Brothers, 1969); Carlos F. Mendoza Tió, *Investigaciones literarias: Lola Rodríguez de Tió* (San Juan, P.R.: n.p., 1975), Vol. 5; Federico Ribes Tovar, *El libro puertorriqueño de Nueva York (Handbook of the Puerto Rican Community)* (New York: Grandes Emigraciones, 1968), Vol. 1, pp. 47–49; Federico Ribes Tovar, *La mujer puertorriqueña; su vida y evolución a través de la historia (The Puerto Rican Woman; Her Life and Evolution Throughout History,* 1972), pp.117–120; Federico Ribes Tovar, *100 Outstanding Puerto Ricans* (New York: Plus Ultra),1976) pp.117–119. See also Bernardo Vega, *Memorias de Bernardo Vega: contribución a la historia de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York* (Rio Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1980), pp.106, 135–36.

5 Aurea María Sotomayor Miletti, *De lengua, razón y cuerpo: Nuevos poetas contemporáneos puertorriqueños* (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1987), p. 22; *Have You Seen La Mujer Revolucionaria Puertorriqueña? The Poetry and Lives of Revolutionary Puerto Rican Women* (n.p.: n.d.), 6, 8.

6 Norma Valle (Ferrer), *Luisa Capetillo* (San Juan, n.p., 1975); see also Yamila Azize, *Luchas de la mujer en Puerto Rico, 1898–1919* (Puerto Rico: Litografía Metropolitana, 1979), pp. 67–81; Amílcar Tirado, Nélida Pérez and Rina Benmayor, "Luisa Capetillo (1879–1922)," (New York: Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, n.d.); Vega, *Memorias de Bernardo Vega,* pp.148–49; Altagracia Ortiz, "Historical Perspectives on Feminism and the Puerto Rican Woman," *Journal of Women's History* (Fall, 1989), 1,2:170.

7 Ruth Gruber, *Felisa Rincón de Gautier: The Mayor of San Juan* (New York: Dell, 1972).

8 Ribes Tovar, *La mujer puertorriqueña,* pp. 235–39.

9 In his memoir Vega mentions that Belpré was instrumental in getting a *"cuevita"* (little cave) in her library at 115th Street, as a meeting place for a group of writers, artist, and other professionals who called themselves *"Puerto Rico Literario"* ("Literary Puerto Rico"). Vega, *Memorias de Bernardo Vega,* p. 203.

10 Frances Carol Lochner, ed., *Contemporary Authors* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1978), 73–74:51; Martha E. Ward and Dorothy A. Marquardt, eds., *Authors of Books for Young People* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1971), p. 40; Doris de Montreville and Elizabeth Crawford, eds. *Fourth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1978), pp. 34–36; Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, "The Forgotten Migrant: Educated Puerto Rican Women in New York City, 1920–1940," in Edna Acosta-Belén, ed., *The Puerto Rican Woman: Perspectives on Culture, History, and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1986), pp. 173–75. See also Ortiz, "Historical Perspectives," p. 169.

11 Lillian López, "Interviews with Pura Belpré" (New York: Columbia University Oral History Project, 1976). The transcripts of these interviews are located in the Oral History Research Office, Butler Library, Columbia University.

12 Pura Belpré, *Pérez and Martina: A Portorican Folk Tale* (New York: Warne, 1932). Belpré's other children's books include: *The Tiger and the Rabbit, and Other Tales* (Boston: Houghton, 1946); Juan *Bobo and the Queen's Necklace: A Puerto Rican Folk Tale* (New York: Warne, 1962); *Ote: A Puerto Rican Folk Tale* (New York: Pantheon, 1969); *Santiago* (New York: Warne, 1969); *Dance of the Animals* (New York: Warne, 1973); *The Rainbow-Colored Horse* (New York: Warne, 1978).

13 Lillian López (with Pura Belpré), "Reminiscences of Two Turned-on Librarians," in Edward Mapp, ed., *Puerto Rican Perspectives* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1974), pp. 83–96.

14 López's sister, Evelina López Antonetty, a well-known community leader in the Bronx, is the subject of a short biography by Federico Ribes Tovar, *El libro puertorriqueño*, p. 302.

15 Sánchez-Korrol, *"The Forgotten Migrant,"* pp. 171–73; see also, Ortiz, *"Historical Perspectives,"* pp. 168–69.

16 Yvette Jiménez de Báez, *Julia de Burgos, vida y poesía*, (San Juan: Editorial Coquí, 1966).

17 Carmen Lucila Quiroga, "Julia de Burgos: el desarrollo de la conciencia femenina en la expresión poética," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1980); Kathleen M. Imbruno, "La poesía feminista puertorriqueña: De la toma de conciencia a la toma de palabra," (Ph.D. diss., Middlebury College, 1986), pp. 107–112,137–38, 209, 233. See also Margarite Fernández Olmo, "From Metropolis: Puerto Rican Women Poets and Immigration Experience," *Third Woman* (1982), I, 2:42, Sandra Maria Esteves, "The Feminist Puerto Rican Women in the United States," in Asela Rodríguez de Laguna, ed., *Images and Identities: The Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), pp. 171–77; Iris Zavala Martínez, "A Critical Inquiry into the Life and Work of Julia de Burgos," in Cynthia García Coll and María de Lourdes Mattei, eds., *The Psychosocial Development of Puerto Rican Women* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 1–30.

18 Maria M. Solá, ed., *Julia de Burgos: Yo misma fui mi ruta* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1986), pp. 7–48; Isabel Cuchí Coll, *Grandes poetisas de América* (San Juan, 1982).

19 See Vega, *Memorias de Bernardo Vega*, pp. 250,51.

20 See for examples: Esteves, "The Feminist Viewpoint," 172; and Luz Raquel Avila's 1975 poem for *"A Julia" Julia de Burgos/eres el verbo hecho carne/...eres la voz de la Patria/Julia de Burgos poeta/ combatiente, feminista/maestra, mujer, obrera/y del pueblo compañera."* (Julia de Burgos? You are the made flesh/...you are the voice of the nation/Julia de Burgos poet/soldier, feminist/ teacher, woman, worker/and companion of the people," in Lydia Zoraida Barreto, ed., *Poemario de la mujer puertorriqueña* (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1976), 36–7.

21 Ribes Tovar, *100 Outstanding Puerto Ricans*, pp. 260–64.

22 The Long Island Historical Society Project ran from1973 to 1974, and was directed by John Vázquez, then professor of sociology and ethnic studies at Brooklyn Community College, and Tony M. Cucchiara, research assistant and project coordinator for the society. It involved the interviews of 69 Puerto Ricans, including several women, who settled in Brooklyn during the years 1917 and 1940. See Joyce White, "A Record of Puerto Rican Memories," *Sunday News* (May 4, 1975), B2, B4. Partial transcripts of these taped interviews were prepared by the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños in connection with their own project on Puerto Rican settlers. The Centro interviewed women of the 1930s and 1950s migration to the United States. The transcripts of both projects are part of the Centro's manuscript collection, but some of the interviews are subject to closure. The Centro, however, has used some of the interviews for a radio documentary on Puerto Rican female garment workers and an article on some of these garment workers and their children; both sources will be discussed under the section on women and work.

23 Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917–1948* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 112; Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, "In Search of Unconventional Women: Histories of Puerto Rican Women in Religious Vocations Before Mid-Century," *Oral History Review* (Fall, 1988), 16, 2:50–54.

24 Ribes Tovar, *La mujer puertorriqueña*, pp. 231–33.

25 Sánchez-Korrol, "In Search of Unconventional Women," pp. 48–50; 55–62.

26 Ribes Tovar, *Lolita Lebrón, la prisionera* (New York: Plus Ultra, 1974).

27 Lolita Lebrón, *Sándalo en la celda* (San Juan: Cooperativa de Artes Gráficas Romualdo Real, 1976). This collection of poems will be discussed separately.

28 Esteves, "The Feminist Viewpoint," p. 72; see also Elnairis Rivera's poem "A Lolita Lebrón," in Nancy Zayas and Juan Angel Silén, *La mujer en la lucha hoy* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Kikiriki, 1972), p. 95.

29 There are some minor biographical sketches on community leaders, artists, and other working and professional women in Ribes Tovar, *El libro puertorriqueño*, and in his *La mujer puertorriqueña*.

M I G E N T E

Antonia Pantoja & Esperanza Martell

On March 8th International Working Women's Day (IWWD) is celebrated all over the world. IWWD was established in 1919 to honor the militancy of garment workers. In 1911, 146 workers, mostly women, died at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire on the Lower East Side in New York City because the owners had locked the fire doors. Thousands of garment workers took to the streets in the days that followed demanding better working conditions.

In recognition of the leadership Puerto Rican women have provided to the Puerto Rican community in New York City, MI GENTE focuses on some of the organizational history of Puerto Rican women in New York in interviews conducted by Blanca Vázquez with Antonia Pantoja *and* Esperanza Martell, *community leaders from different generations. The editor wishes to acknowledge the participation of Elizabeth Yeampierre in the Pantoja interview.*

Photographs/LEFT Antonia Pantoja, Women's Studies, Hunter College;
RIGHT Esperanza Martell at anti-Vietnam War demonstration. Máximo R. Colón, photographer

ANTONIA PANTOJA

From the 1950s through the early 1970s, Puerto Rican women founded and led many of our community organizations. In a keynote address at the Bella Abzug Conference series held at Hunter College last spring, Antonia Pantoja, *founder of Aspira, the Puerto Rican Forum and the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs, among others, spoke about "the erasing of the footsteps" of these women and their struggle to achieve social and economic justice. This feminine leadership, she says, acted with a distinct style and philosophy. Women emphasized collective decision-making, the development of new leaders, especially among the youth, and the good of the group over the personal gain of the individual. Since 1985,* Pantoja *has been involved in the development of Producir, Inc., a community-based organization for economic self-sufficiency in Puerto Rico. In the interview that follows,* Antonia Pantoja *discusses what she calls the deliberate "overthrow" of Puerto Rican women leaders by Puerto Rican men in the early 1970s and the situation women on the Island face today.*

What kind of leadership style did Puerto Rican women foster?

We would meet a lot in each other's home and we'd eat together...it was that type of environment. We arrived collectively at decisions and helped one another..., which is pretty much the way women go about things. You might have the baby in one hand and you're talking on the phone to some politician and then you put it down and go tend to the baby and keep on doing whatever you're doing, cook and at the same time fill out whatever...

There would be a constant freedom of telling one another, "Hey, you know, that's not right. You were too sharp with blah, blah, blah," and we accepted that from one another. So there was growth and development from our contact with each other. We were responsible to each other, we were our brother's keeper, and because of that, then the men had to follow the

style...

Also, we put limits on ourselves in terms of income. It wasn't because of any political ideology, it was because we said we are a poor community. You cannot afford...salaries that are higher than the salaries of senators and congressmen. ...Women are very much aware of money because they deal with budgets at home. So we were very aware of the fact that if you saddle yourself with an institution that is going to cost you $150,000 a year to run, where the hell are you going to raise that kind of money?

How did the overthrow of a female leadership come about?

By the early 1970s a group of Puerto Rican men went about in a deliberate manner to remove women from leadership positions. The now well-known secret of the "Wednesday night group" was that they were effective in not only replacing women in leadership positions in the organizations and agencies of the Puerto Rican community, but these men were also effective in preventing any other position from falling into the hands of women.

...One of them who was a friend of mine who was there told me, "You know what happened, Toni? I was there...It was a matter of—all these women—what's going on in our community? Everything...is headed by a woman, what's the matter with us?" And the reason women were in leadership was not that we sat and planned that we were going to have a women's leadership. It is that because of the conditions of our community and the migration at that moment in the history of our community, it was women who took leadership. Women were in the labor unions and they were the organizers. Later on some of the women who I talked to told me, "I killed myself out there organizing and then when they hired a paid organizer it was a man."

The coming of a male leadership made a difference in organizational objectives and philosophy. The main characteristic of functioning has been a one-person, hierarchical and closed-system leadership style, concern with personal and career goals...

So when you talk about the overthrow, this has happened many times...I wasn't even aware of it because I've always been the kind of person who's so busy doing a thousand things that sometimes I miss taking the pulse of something that's going on around me... otherwise I would have done something then because I'm no fool...I know how to be soft and how to be understanding and how to be sensitive to this other area of human activity and the human experience, but if I need to be hard I can be hard.

Those men are still around, verdad?

Sí, they are the leadership that doesn't go away, *chica* [*laughing*]. That's the other thing. We knew how to say, "Okay, you're in leadership now but then you have to leave and let somebody else come in. You have a responsibility to develop what you're doing, finish it but also of seeing to it that somebody comes behind you that can occupy that position—hand in and pass over." And we did it consciously and purposely so that in Aspira and the [Puerto Rican] Forum, I left those places and I have never come back...I don't believe in going back. I'm the kind of person who's into the next stage of development.

There's also a new generation of women who are in leadership positions who have the same style as those men.

There are women who think that to become a leader you have to imitate men. But I think that is a very serious error. And if women do that they're destroying the possibility of what they could add to this world. I seriously believe that women are instrumental in the development of a more humane society and in the change that we need to see happen to this world. Women could do it but not in imitating men. The idea is not for you to become a harder and better oppressor...The idea is to bring your view of the world and your understanding of things in a

leadership style and with leadership skills. But you got to have a philosophy and you got to have an ideology, it's really an ideology. Women must be made aware of it because a lot of the training that is offered to women, that idea that is imparted is that you get your pin stripped suit and your briefcase and be hard. "Go out there in search of power." And power is a funny thing...You can use power in other ways. And what power is for depends on the objective that you want to achieve.

What do we do about these organizations on our community that no longer function? You all know that organizational life has a certain time to grow then it becomes bureauracratized and it should die. And you start all over again like the Phoenix from the ashes. This is why I'm saying all these institutions we have and you're criticizing, help them die, don't let them agonize and agonize and be destructive in the process. Help them die and from the ashes you bring another one out.

What is the situation of women today in Puerto Rico?
Te voy a decir una cosa...I moved to Puerto Rico and I find that the Puerto Rico you find there is incredible, I mean it's symbolized in the way people drive. "If you don't get out of the way I'll bump your car and I'm going to go on the sidewalk and get ahead of you. ...And if you don't watch out then I'll get out of the car and beat you up or fire a gun at you," and it's done in Puerto Rico. So that style of "I'll destroy you in order to get to where I'm going"— that's the important thing.

Mira, women have a difficult decision to make and for Puerto Rican women it's going to be even more difficult because of all kinds of cultural reasons...Do we want to support men in their taking and selling of drugs? Do we want to support men—because we love them—and get infected with AIDS and give it to a child that we're going to bring for this man? Do we want to do that or do we withdraw from men? Let them do that, if they want to do that let them do it.

...This is the moment in which women have to decide and I know that I have participated in meetings where we have said, we can't split the effort of the Puerto Rican community into a man-woman thing....

What are you going to do? Are you going to keep on supporting a bunch of men that are doing this?...We're going to have to make a decision and the women in Puerto Rico are farther behind...You're very far advanced here. At least you realize that this is going on. The women in Puerto Rico are still saying, *"Ah, pero es que yo tengo, bendito yo tengo que atenderlo a el, y..."* Okay, it's time that we said it. It's time we said to the men, "Okay, you're out there...selling drugs or taking drugs. You're out there running around...Well, you can't come back in here...you stay out there because I'm not going to participate."

What happens to the boys in those communities? What kind of men are we going to educate and develop? But the thing is if you stay in these situations in which you have a man who comes around and beats you up in front of the kids, the boys are going to get the message "when Daddy used to be around and she was running around and he's come over and put her in her place, that's what you have to do with women...you have to *darle su bofetá pa' que aprenda*. And in a way it's because we love them. You hit her because you love her." *Bueno*, those little messages that are given to the kids and then the girls understand that well, you know, *tú lo quieres y tiene que quedarse*. It's not only the church who does that. The priests and the ministers, and they do, they say, Well, *tú le va a decir, mira...Ah, pero fíjate—con los niños, con el hogar, ¿y qué tú hiciste? ¿Tal vez tú hicistes algo? como si fuera posible que* anything you did justifies that.

And also, we have to talk to one another and stop considering that we are each other's enemy because, you see, what was done in our culture

was—what's the ultimate thing for a woman? To catch a man. So if you're out there catching a man, then the other woman is a rival, so you're my enemy...

We have to develop a community of people who together will be supportive of one another. Women think in terms like that, the fact that you need a community of people upon whom you can depend. Women can build communities and they'll be *different* communities and we have to be inventive about it...And in the process we might create a different world.

And with those men that are ready.
If there are some men that are ready. I think men are going to have to get it together. ❑

ESPERANZA MARTELL

In the 1970s Puerto Ricans raised in New York took to the streets demanding civil rights and social justice. The Puerto Rican organizations that arose at the time, the Young Lords, El Comité and the U.S. branch of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, had been influenced by the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements of the 1960s and 70s and by the national liberation struggles in Latin America, Asia and Africa. As the women's movement gained impetus, women of color created organizations such as the Third World Women's Alliance and the Latin Women's Collective to battle sexism and to more specifically address the need to help women develop as revolutionary leaders. Esperanza Martell, *longtime activist, counselor, and co-founder of the Latin Women's Collective (LWC), discusses the history of the LWC, an organization in existence between 1975 and 1978, whose goal was to develop Latina women as leaders.*

The Latin Women's Collective represented the rise of a new generation of leadership in the Puerto Rican community. What was going on at the time?
The Collective began at the culmination of a period of struggle within the Puerto Rican and Third World community in this city...Many progressive organizations were born as a result of the Civil Rights, anti-war, student and community movements and national liberation struggles, such as Students for a Democratic Society, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, the Black Panther Party, [and] the Young Lords...The Vietnam War had a lot of effect also, especially the issue of Puerto Ricans going to serve in the military.

People were asking questions and there were no answers...There were very few role models at the time...People were talking about how to develop leadership in our community...I think that the times make people break. And that's where the Collective comes from, it didn't happen because some women just got together... It happened for real clear political reasons at the time.

Was there a role model for the Latin Women's Collective?
The model, if there is a model comes out of the Vietnamese Women's Union [in Vietnam]... Let me just go back a little bit... In '71 there was the Vietnamese Women's Conference in Toronto, Canada. One of the things that the Vietnamese had said when people asked them, "How can we support the Vietnamese liberation struggle?" was to bring the war home, organize your communities, that's how you could help us.

This conference in Canada was very key... Women from all over the United States came, the majority of them were very young... The Puerto Ricans that were there were from El Comité, the Young Lords and from the Third World Women's Alliance. The conference brought us together to talk about women's issues, something that we were not used to doing...People

were very committed to change and this was part of change—changing social relationships between men and women in a real active way...We were beginning to develop positive images of women...By this time, Lolita Lebrón was a real key figure because we were organizing the liberation of the Nationalists. *La consigna era "Lolita Lebrón, Ejemplo de Valor."*

Starting in '74, the Vietnamese were going through their final offensive, and they called again on the women of the United States to propel work around Vietnam. So they had a second conference in '75. Genoveva Clemente was there, Helen Rodríguez, Sandy Trujillo, Carmen Lora from El Comité, Olga Sanabria for PSP...I think Concha Mendoza was there, and Ana Maria Garcia, women who were active in community-based struggles...

We agreed to do an activity in the Puerto Rican community when we returned in support of the Vietnamese. We organized an activity in East Harlem, which was very exciting because it took place on May 4, 1975 and the Vietnamese had entered Saigon on May 1, so we had a victory celebration...

When we started the Collective the majority of women were Puerto Rican, but we also had Dominicans, Colombians, a Chicana, and Cubans, so we called ourselves the Latin Women's Collective. We thought it would be very important to do that. We had women who came out of political organizations, and we had some women who were independent...And though the Collective was an autonomous organization, its leadership came from political organizations, basically El Comité. Our theme or our motto...was "Women's Liberation through the Working Class Struggle." *La liberación de la mujer a través de la lucha obrera.* And even though we had some women who were teachers or counselors or students or whatever, we all agreed that what we wanted to do was to organize our community, and that what we needed to do was education on a community level and internally for the women in the organization. We would develop leadership by combining the political and the personal.

What do you mean by that?
We identified that what stopped women from taking leadership was that we had emotional blocks created by our oppression. The conditioning of Puerto Rican and Latina women is not to talk, not to open your mouth. The issue is *respect*: respect your mother, your brother, your father, respect anybody older than you in authority... You look down when spoken to, you do not ask questions, you just *do*. So we had women who were very dynamic who just did what was expected of them and never said anything. The collective process was to talk, to talk through our tears but to talk. We would say, "Just keep on crying but keep on talking." Women would cry about personal issues, they would cry because they had to do a presentation, because they hadn't read something or whatever the reason. So it was a process of talking through tears, of listening to each other, of identifying that we weren't alone, that we had the same problems, and coming to the realization that we *could* change, that we could move forward and that we could do it collectively. And also, doing that within a political context because our process was similar to the consciousness raising groups of the white women's movement. However, the difference is that we worked within a political context. It wasn't just because we were women that we were oppressed or exploited, it was because we were part of a class and our class in general was exploited and more so if we were women...

We used to do educationals. One of the topics that someone did was "Why did women wear make-up?" And it started from—"Oh, we just want to be pretty and we want to attract men and it has to do with sexism"— and it went down to corporate America. We wear make-up and we like it because the media sells it to us and says that this is how we're supposed to look and

the bottom line is that somebody is making money on us. The cosmetics industry is one of the largest industries in the world. It was a very exciting session.

And we always paired people with more "experience," whether it be in writing or in speaking with someone who was less experienced... I remember that someone was going to get married and she wanted an educational on why women get married. And eventually she got married but the educationals were a way of processing material within a political context and trying to understand how we make decisions.

54 *What happened to the work of the LWC?*
We tried to generate work on a community level but from a political perspective. We had committees organized around health, education and labor issues. However, the majority of the women, even though they came from a working class background, were professionals. And the bigger the organization got, the hardèr it was to do the educational piece within the Collective, so that our work in relationship to our theme, "Women's Liberation through the Working Class Struggle," got further away from what we were actually doing.

And also, the politics of the time, let's remember that the Collective came out of a period where there was political struggle, but the politics of the time were beginning to become more liberal, more reformist. The late 1970s were devastating to the different social movements in this country. There was an out-and-out attack on the Puerto Rican independence movement and on the left in general. Many organizations did not survive the government's attack. The movement was also young and it made many mistakes, especially when it came to the personal needs of its members...The lack of political maturity, not having a good understanding of the development of organizations, infighting, and overwork burned out many. So we have to look at what happened to the Collective in that context.

However, when we run into women who had been in the Collective, whether they were on the leadership level or members or on the fringes of the Collective, and even men, everyone says that the Collective played a very important role in their lives. Many of the women who are in leadership in our community today were either directly or indirectly involved in the Collective. So we were doing something right...

Many of the women who were in the Collective are now doing work around women—whether it's in city government, culture, academia, housing or health care. And many of them keep promoting the politics of the Collective. What I found interesting is that even those members who went to Puerto Rico continued doing that work in Puerto Rico, for example, Margie Wolchinger heads the Women's Commission.

How do you see political organizing among Latina women today?
You have some Latina women doing work around battering, rape, housing, education, but some of them from a narrow feminist perspective...in the sense that they don't have a class perspective. A lot of them are talking about that there is a women's problem, but that it is created by men and they don't go beyond that. They don't see it as systematic which is a real danger...For example, you have women who organize around malnutrition in a community. They want more WIC programs or to establish breast-feeding clinics, but they don't look at the systematic aspects...All the services in the world are not going to change the relationship of women to the society... We have to look at the system and begin to educate people... What happens is that you have a very service-oriented perspective and the people that come to you become powerless.

They depend on you.
They depend on you and they depend

on the program. The program leaves as happens every day and the person is out there on the streets again. So what we need are programs—and this is where the political perspective comes in—in which people are organized and are educated to take control, to take the power that was taken away from them. For that you need a sense of self, you need your history and not just your history as a woman. You need your history as part of your nation, and part of your class. You need to know science, you need to know philosophy, you need to know everything that's possible. That's what I mean by a political perspective. So we have to do a lot of educating if we're really talking about liberation instead of maintenance. It's like the battered women's programs, I mean it's great that women are able to be taken out of their homes and find a safe place. But that is not the long term answer. It's still a Bandaid. We have to get our people, and people in general, to begin to ask questions so that they could free themselves. So that's what I'm talking about, a perspective that talks about equality in its broadest sense—a socialist perspective, democracy in its broadest sense.

Remember the workshop we did in the Collective around commitment? I think that that's the bottom line. I think about this stuff all the time. One of the things we talked about when we were active in the sixties and seventies was "Each one, teach one." Everything we know we give it to the next person and we keep the tradition going. The reason the Collective was formed was because we had a group of people who made a commitment to struggle and make change, to struggle with self and with the world around them. ❑

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Growing Up puertorriqueña:
The Feminist Bildungsroman and the Novels of Nicholasa Mohr and Magali García Ramis

Margarite Fernández Olmos

One of the major contributions of feminist literary criticism has been its assertion that literary genres, like most cultural artifacts, reflect not only a particular sociohistorical and cultural orientation, but also a sexual one as well. The genre of the *bildungsroman* or the novel of formation is an ideal case in point. Considered for years a primarily European genre, the characteristics ascribed to it, both thematic and formal, have usually referred to the traditional male variant defined in 1913 by Wilhelm Dilthey:

> A regulated development within the life of the individual is observed, each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony.[1]

Martin Swales has observed, however, that prior to Dilthey's description of the genre there existed an earlier version, that of Karl Morgenstern, who in the early 1820s was the first to use the term for novels dealing with certain thematic material "...because it portrays the *Bildung* of the hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain stage of completeness; and also secondly because it is by virtue of this portrayal that it furthers the reader's *Bildung* to a much greater extent than any other kind of novel."[2] I believe that in this original definition one discovers the motivation of the genre in its contemporary reemergence by women authors with their own particular motivations and objectives.

> Although the primary assumption underlying the *Bildungsroman*—the evolution of a coherent self—has come under attack in modernist and avant-garde fiction, this assumption remains cogent for women writers who now for the first time find themselves in a world increasingly responsive to their needs. It is no wonder, then, that the novel of development has become, in Ellen Morgan's words, "the most salient form of literature" for contemporary women writing about women.[3]

Feminist scholars have noted the patterns of difference between male manifestations of the genre and female

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ones, primarily in earlier novels in which the heroine, rather than obtaining the individuality and autonomy which is the ultimate goal for males, would lose her freedom, integrating her destiny with that of a male or remaining in the environs of the home. Although male-centered texts value initiative, industry and individuation achieved through conflict and struggle with society, passivity and compliance are the values ascribed to females in traditional novels, leaving them little room for exploration or change. Male developmental progression is alleged to be spiral while woman's is circular; females learn the rituals of human relationships at home in order to replicate the lives of their female ancestors and remain in or return to the domestic sphere, their "natural realm." Women who identify with the father or rebel or transgress the "ideology of the feminine" in any way are perceived as unnatural and are punished by confinement, insanity or death. Referring to the English novel of maturation of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Annis Pratt has observed the following:

> The novel of development portrays a world in which the young woman hero is destined for disappointment. The vitality and hopefulness characterizing the adolescent hero's attitude toward her future here meet and conflict with the expectations and dictates of the surrounding society. Every element of her desired world... inevitably clashes with patriarchal norms. Attempts to develop independence are met with limitation and immurement, training in menial and frustrating tasks, restrictions of the intellect...and limitation of erotic activity. This collision between the hero's evolving self and society's imposed identity appears consistently throughout the history of women's fiction.[4]

The patterns of women's development in fiction are less bleak and restrictive when one observes more contemporary works of fiction. Gender is now perceived as a significant and even essential factor in the developmental process as an alternative female model of development redefines the genre. Expanded notions of female psychological development have undoubtedly been influenced by the feminist movement of the 1970s and its subsequent revision of social and psychological theories. Such theorists as Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein place heavy emphasis on the mother-infant bond with regard to the influence of gender on identity.[5] "By shifting the focus from Oedipal to pre-Oedipal experience and by highlighting the interpersonal relationships rather than anatomy, feminist theorists construct a picture of femininity as alternative, not inferior, to masculinity."[6] Due to the mother's role as primary parent and the father's greater remoteness in traditional patriarchal childrearing practices, as well as the fact that mothers identify more closely with their daughters than with their sons, a girl continues in a pre-Oedipal relationship with her mother for a longer period. She sees herself as partly continuous with the mother figure, while boys learn early of separation and differentiation.

> From the retention of preoedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate.[7]

According to feminist revisionist theories, this process of identification and differentiation endures throughout

adulthood so that females, who do not turn absolutely from the mother to the father but rather add him to their world, define their sense of self through affiliation and relationships. Theories of this type have led to the conclusion, finally, that the female developmental course is not a failed or truncated one as had been previously assumed when comparing it to that of males; it is simply different.

The *Bildungsroman* is a genre with interesting possibilities, not only for North American and European women authors (the writers who are most often studied in critical analysis of the genre) but also for ethnically and racially marginalized groups—both men and women—in U.S. society, as well as contemporary women authors from Latin America.[8] Often the genre as expressed in their works reflects the identity and adjustment problems of the protagonist to the dominant society, revealing the influence of objective cultural values and personal surroundings on the moral maturation of the hero. One sees in these works the effect of circumstances on personality, as well as its opposite. In asserting an identity not always condoned or accepted by the power structure of his or her society, the writer attempts to create new standards and perspectives. For women, the retrospective point of view which allows for distancing and irony makes the *Bildungsroman* an ideal genre for the expression of the complexities of female development; its focus on the interaction between the protagonist and her environment also allows for a critical examination of patriarchal values and traditions in the socialization of the individual female. In addition, the possibilities for growth and transformation of the hero (as well as for the reader) make this genre an ambitious and fulfilling one for women authors.

Societal considerations are fundamental in this context since so often the specific patriarchal strictures of the society in which the protagonist develops are more crucial than personal and psychological factors. In the case of ethnic writers in the U.S. and women writers in Latin America, there is a conscious realization that the evolution of the individual is closely interlocked with particular sociohistorical and political considerations. The inward, introspective account which is so typical of the genre is usually tempered by an emphasis on society and surroundings.

Novels of formation, therefore, vary according to the national traditions in which they are inserted and the objectives of their authors. The Venezuelan Teresa de la Parra's novel *Ifigenia* (1924) provides an interesting example of what Edna Aizenberg calls a "failed *Bildungsroman*" as the precepts of the genre are never fulfilled:

> [V]iola la intuición de una coherencia final y la fe en la imaginación estética y moral que Buckley postula como esencia de muchas novelas de iniciación. La integridad personal y social que constituye el telos del Bildungsroman, y que se logra a través de una interacción fructífera del yo experimentador con el yo narrador—de lo interno con lo externo—simplemente no existen en Ifigenia. Al contrario: la protagonista continuamente subraya la brecha entre las dos esferas, recordándonos cuán hábil se ha vuelto en el arte de fingir.[9]

Similarly, in Gabriela Mora's analysis of *La pájara pinta* (1975) by the Colombian Albalucía Angel, the critic underscores Angel's transgression of patriarchal narrative discourse:

> Al revés, entonces, de esa afirmativa integración social del héroe del bildungsroman clásico, en este latinoamericano la heroína rompe con la organización socioeconómica de su mundo, que con sus experiencias ayuda a desenmascarar.[10]

The idea of the personal tied to the political is also found in María Inés Lagos Pope's study of the novel *Balún Canán* (1951) by the Mexican author Rosario Castellanos. Lagos Pope is of the opinion that this novel, considered by some a precursor of the "boom" novels of the 1960s, is, among other things, a novel of maturation, *"pues descubrimos en ella la dimensión de la búsqueda de una filiación, de una identidad, y de una reconciliación con el origen para encontrar nuevos horizontes, no sólo al nivel individual sino también al nivel nacional."*[11]

The analysis of cultural and historical forces upon the development of the individual leads to interesting cross-cultural studies, particularly in situations in which the native culture of the child is different from that of the larger society in which she lives; Paule Marshall's *Brown Girls, Brownstones* (1959) is an excellent example of this form in the U.S. What happens, for example, when the "alien" culture that is so often the antagonist in the Bildungsroman turns out to be precisely that into which the child wants and desires to become assimilated?

Questions of this nature as well cross-cultural considerations can be addressed in a comparison of two novels of formation: *Nilda* (1973), by Nicholasa Mohr, and *Felices días, Tío Sergio* (1986), by Magali García Ramis.[12] This type of analysis has been attempted before with Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean female authors with enlightening results. Paraphrasing the question Geta Le Seur poses in "One Mother, Two Daughters: The Afro-American and the Afro-Caribbean Female *Bildungsroman*"[13] one might ask if a Puerto Rican female child in New York and a Puerto Rican female child on theIsland share a similar history or similar problems. By extension, one might also ask if a comparison between a novel of formation written in English by a Puerto Rican writer of the diaspora and a similar work written in Spanish by an author on the Island has any critical or cultural validity. Hopefully, some of the following attempts to answer these questions will offer an insight and a contribution to the evolving definition of Puerto Rican cultural identity.

Nilda is the first literary work of the Puerto Rican graphic artist Nicholasa Mohr who grew up in New York's "El Barrio" in the 1940s. Mohr has gone on to write several other works, including a novel and collections of short stories, after her first attempt was greeted with critical acclaim. *Nilda* received the 1974 Jane Adams Children's Book Award, was selected as an Outstanding Children's Book of the Year 1973 by the editors of the *New York Times Book Review*, and won Best Children's Book of the Year 1973 by the *School Library Journal*.

The novel follows the story of a young girl's passage from childhood to adolescence in the difficult years of World War II and in the hostile environment of New York's oldest and largest Latino neighborhood. As in most works that describe growing up as a member of a distinct racial or ethnic group in Anglo-dominated U.S. society, the protagonist must confront conflicts that include racism, alienation and the quest for a cultural identity. According to the author:

> My rich heritage as a Puerto Rican, stemming from the Caribbean,Europe and Africa, provides me with source material for a unique interpretation of life in urban America. In my books, I try to express the courage and will to survive of the Puerto Rican, as well as the frailties and ambitions of all people who seek the "American Dream" or a "better way of life."[14]

Nilda is a third-person narrative situated in a specific historic context (the chapters are dated rather than numbered and cover the years from July 1941 to May 1945), and a specific geographic one. The narrator describes four crucial years in the female child's development, from ages 10 to 14.

Similar to other works of this type, the protagonist confronts problems that are fairly universal: youthful problems of family life, sexuality, relationship with peers, friendships, school and career goals. In this work, however, as in others of Hispanic writers in the U.S., each of these problems is explored within the social reality of growing up as a member of a "minority" in the larger society. Ethnicity and cultural tradition, therefore, play an important role in how the character deals with conflict. *Nilda* is a novel that fits into the tradition of Latino literature in the U.S.; at the same time, however, it makes its own distinctly female statement regarding the quest for individuality and maturity within a specifically New York Puerto Rican context.

According to Martínez and Lomelí in their study of Chicano Literature, the protagonists of "identity" novels perceive themselves in an alien environment which is not the result of any existential despair, but rather "their alienation generally comes from their social circumstances and can therefore be resolved."[15] This sense of alienation is very much at play in Mohr's work and is skillfully developed in the difficult relationships of the protagonist to the traditional school. As part of the young girl's conflict with authority figures that represent the white, Anglo-American power structure, the educational system is an ideal vehicle for examining the racism and lack of cultural sensitivity toward the Puerto Rican emigrant. In the two chapters that deal with Nilda's schooling, the system's Eurocentric bias and the undervaluing of Latino language and culture is underscored:

> "Brave people they were, our forefathers, going into the unknown where man had never ventured. They were not going to permit the Indian to stop them. This nation was developed from a wild primitive forest into a civilized nation. Where would we all be today if not for brave people? We would have murder, thievery, and no belief in God."
>
> It was always more or less the same speech that preceded the Pledge of Allegiance...
>
> One of her most strict rules was that no Spanish was allowed in her classroom. Anybody caught speaking or even saying one word of Spanish had to put out both arms and clench his hands into fists. "None of that," she would say, "if you are ever going to be good Americans. You will never amount to anything worthwhile unless you learn English. You'll stay just like your parents. Is that what you people want? Eh?" she would ask earnestly, waiting for an answer.
>
> "No."
>
> "No, who?"
>
> "No, Miss Langhorn." (52)

Although Mohr has said that *Nilda* is not a strictly autobiographical work, there are obviously some autobiographical elements, as one notes in her comments regarding her own experiences in the New York City school system.

> "I learned in the New York City public schools...that the Americans saved us from the cruel Spaniards, that they, in a sense, adopted us. We in turn had to be grateful, speak only English, and strive toward total assimilation. In essence, to succeed, I would have to reject a culture and history that I actually knew nothing about. My knowledge about myself, the history of the Puerto Rican people, was to come later, much later, when I was able to travel and read books that held the truth." [16]

Other powerful "outside" forces which create an atmosphere of repression and social discrimination are the police (in their racial slurs and brutality toward Nilda and her neighbors) and the welfare agencies. In these and other situations the protagonist is constantly made aware of her social

position and her dependence on others, and, although social class distinction and ethnic discrimination is not analyzed at any length by the protagonist, it is a constant presence. In one of the book's most vivid scenes, Nilda must accompany her mother to a social welfare office to try to obtain public assistance. Her step-father has taken ill and cannot work and the family members (Nilda, her three older brothers, her mother, aunt, and oldest brother's girlfriend and baby) are all trying to survive on a meager income. Nilda's powerlessness as well as her mother's are painfully demonstrated.

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> "Let me see your hands! Wake up, young lady! Let me see your hands!" Startled, Nilda saw that Miss Heinz was speaking to her. Extending her arms and spreading out her fingers, she showed the woman her palms.
>
> "Turn your hands over. Over, turn them over. Let me see your nails." Nilda slowly turned over her hands. "You have got filthy nails. Look at that, Mrs. Ramírez. She's how old? Ten years old? Filthy." Impulsively, Nilda quickly pushed her hands behind her back and looked down at the floor.
>
> "Why don't you clean your nails, young lady?" Nilda kept silent. "How often do you bathe?" Still silent, Nilda looked at her mother. She wanted to tell her to make the woman stop, but she saw that her mother was not looking her way; instead she was staring straight ahead.(68)

In her interview with Edna Acosta Belén, Mohr mentions the fact that the novel caused some concern with her publishers due to its treatment of the Church.[17] The traditional, pre-Vatican II Catholic Church that Nilda experiences in the 1940s with its strict rituals and its oppressive summer camp for girls is contrasted with her Spanish step-father's revolutionary atheism and Marxist analysis of social injustice. Catholicism is portrayed as a repressive system in which whites or "Anglos" represent power: " She wondered if Puerto Ricans were ever allowed to be nuns, fathers, or brothers" and most of what passes for piety is veiled hypocrisy. Her mother's faith in the Church and in the supernatural is juxtaposed with her stepfather's cynicism and distrust of authority. Nilda, who from the first is portrayed as a curious, strong-willed child, tends to side with her step-fathers's more practical, worldly explanations. The only religion that she finds attractive is the Pentecostal faith of her friends for its incorporation of Puerto Rican music and culture; the scenes of Pentecostal ceremonies with their lively music and typical Caribbean cuisine are more appealing to the young child's sensibilities and cultural affinities. There are many other aspects of this work that are of a sociological interest to those concerned with the literary expression referred to as "Latino art" in the U.S., but one of the more absorbing aspects of the novel for our purposes here is its portrayal of the gradual awakening of a female consciousness in the heroine.

Several critics have commented on the differences between Nicholasa Mohr's work and that of Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), noting that *Nilda* lacks some of the more unsavory aspects of ghetto existence that are stressed in Thomas' version of events. Although crime, drug use and prostitution are all alluded to in *Nilda*, these are not the central focus of the text. For some, this means that Mohr's work is less "authentic;" the author's reply is that her work is written from the point of view of a woman who, like the majority, has not experienced these critical problems personally but rather has shared in the small, everyday struggles of life in *El Barrio*.

> If people really want to know about *El Barrio*, don't they also have to get a sense of the humdrum insignificance of it all, the forgettable, unheroic little dramas that make up the lives of regular

working people? Surely the subtle changes and awakening insights going on inside of a sheltered 14-year-old girl like Nilda can reveal something about the "mean streets" that go unaccounted for in Piri's big time escapades. [18]

The idea of the "little drama" is more typical of the female *Bildungsroman's* emphasis on relationships rather than on adventure and external conflict. The central character in this work observes the world around her and analyzes the actions and activities of others in relation to her growing understanding of life. Although there are, of course, conflicts and hurdles that must be confronted, the stress is on the protagonist's growing sense of herself and her role in relation to others.

As a woman-centered text, Mohr's portrayal of female characters merits some consideration. Similar to another U.S. Hispanic *Bildungsroman, The House on Mango Street* (1984) by the Chicana Sandra Cisneros, the female characters are portrayed outside of their stereotypical and archetypal modes. In both the Chicana and Puerto Rican novels, the usual images of the virginal, self-sacrificing mother , the sensual temptress and the prophetic *curandera* or witch are given alternative treatment. Although these characters can be found in their works, they are not presented in their usual fashion. Both Cisneros and Mohr, for example, include the character of the spiritual healer or *curandera;* rather than the evil witch archetype that is the traditional portrayal of this cultural figure, however, Cisneros and Mohr's characters are sympathetic and, basically, harmless. The *curandera* is simply presented as another member of the female cast of characters that can be found in most Latino settings. The image of the self-sacrificing mother is also to be found in Mohr's novel; Nilda's mother is a hard-working woman who has had few joys in her difficult life and whose sole purpose is to keep the family intact. Her deathbed warning to her daughter against following in her footsteps, however, hoping that she will find a future free of stifling family bonds and obligations is not only one of the most touching scenes of the work but also one of the most revealing. The mother's advice deviates from the traditional domestic role for Latina women and is Mohr's primary message for young female readers of the text.

> "Do you have that feeling, honey? That you have something all yours...you must...like when I see you drawing sometimes, I know you have something all yours. Keep it...hold on, guard it. Never give it to nobody...not your lover, not to your kids...it don't belong to them...and...they have no right... no right to take it. We are all born alone...and we die all alone. And when I die, Nilda, I know that I take nothing with me that is only mine." She paused and said, "You asked me something, didn't you?...oh yes...Am I happy?...I don't know...But if I cannot see who I am beyond the eyes of the children I bore...then..." turning her head she looked directly at Nilda for a moment "...it was not worth the journey...and I might as well not have bothered at all." (277)

The "growing up" novels of Chicanas and Puerto Ricans, and indeed those of most contemporary female authors, include a cultural critique that is usually not present in the works of male authors: the sexual differentiation of the social roles of men and women, boys and girls. An additional focus of the oppression of the female character, therefore, is in her relationship to men (in Nilda's case her relationship to her brothers) and to the traditional role of young women. Sexual differentiation in the socialization process is stressed throughout the novel, often in the advice of the mother who is the traditional transmitter of culture in the family. On Sundays, for example, Nilda is told that as a girl she must go to Mass even though her brothers are not obliged to do so;

she is also expected to help in the home, while boys are perceived to have their domain outside of it. Beyond these typical situations, however, the radical difference in political and religious beliefs of Nilda's parents is also sexually defined. Her mother is a pious and somewhat superstitious person with immediate concerns and cares, who can open her heart and home unselfishly to her son's girlfriend and baby as part of her moral obligation to the family. The step-father, however, a Spanish immigrant from the Civil War, is a Marxist with a scientific, objective analysis of the problems of the working class and the exploitation of the poor; he nevertheless resists the personal gesture and tries to prevent the girl and baby from moving into their home. The father opens up a larger world of ideas to the young girl, ideas with which she more closely identifies due to her defiant and rebellious nature and also due to her disillusioning experiences with Anglo authority. She recognizes her mother's love and sacrifice, but admires the objective truth of her stepfather's knowledge and wisdom.

In an essay written in 1987, "Puerto Rican Writers in the U.S., Puerto Rican Writers in Puerto Rico: A Separation beyond Language *(testimonio)*,"[19] Mohr describes some of the differences she perceives between the writings of island and mainland Puerto Rican authors that go beyond the use of English or Spanish. Although she claims that "there are few writers from Puerto Rico with whom I feel I can share a sense of camaraderie," she mentions Magali García Ramis' novel *Felices días, Tío Sergio* as a work with which she shares an affinity for a clear and simple prose that is, at the same time, "disarmingly complex."

García Ramis is an author with two published books of fiction: a collection of short stories, *La familia de todos nosotros* (1976)[20], and the novel, *Felices días, Tío Sergio* (1986). Her short stories have been awarded in Puerto Rico and have received Honorable Mention in the prestigious Casa de las Américas competition in Havana. Her works began to emerge in the 1970s, fruitful years for women narrators in Puerto Rico. Due to a combination of factors, which include the influence of the international women's liberation movement and the unprecedented growth of Latin American narrative in the late 60s and early 70s, important women authors began their craft in these years and continue to produce notable works of literature in the 80s, to the extent that today the extensive participation of women in Puerto Rican literature represents one of the most fundamental changes in the literary production of the Island.

Before the appearance of *La familia de todos nosotros*, García Ramis had published several of her stories in such journals as *Sin Nombre* and *Penélope*. According to Josefina Rivera de Alvarez, García Ramis' themes present the following:

> [L]a imagen colectiva de la vida puertorriqueña de tiempos modernos que se ubica en el ambiente particular de las grandes urbanizaciones de clase media que han proliferado en el país durante el curso de las últimas cuatro décadas, en consecuencia del crecimiento que ha experimentado la población de nuestras ciudades mayores...Se trata de una humanidad masificada, de limitados alcances culturales y espirituales, en cuyo medio existencial cotidiano se sintetiza la manifestación de los prinicipales problemas que aquejan a nuestra gente en las épocas actuales: la mediocridad, el consumerismo, la mentalidad política colonizada, la enajenación del ser personal, la crisis de los valores eternos sobre los que se puede sustentar la comunicación, la indefinición respecto del verdadero sentido y propósito de la existencia, etc. En el trasfondo del recuerdo se levanta como contraste de la sociedad industrializada y tecnológica de que es parte el vivir

urbano presentado en el ahora...la tradicional vida en la patriarcal casa de campo de antaño donde tiene sus raíces " la familia de todos nosotros"....[21]

This concept of *"la gran familia puertorriqueña,"* examined from the female perspective and through the account of an individual member of the "family," is explored further in her 1986 novel. Written in the first person, *Felices días*...is a more literary text than *Nilda* in the sense that there is a greater concern with style and language; Mohr's novel is more "oral," as is much of contemporary U.S. Latino literature. García Ramis' novel follows in the tradition of Latin American contemporary narrative although the style is more direct and chronological than that of postmodern, vanguard authors. The simplicity and clarity of her prose can be deceiving, however: *Felices días*... encloses a complex world of ideas that question the fundamentals of contemporary Puerto Rican patriarchal culture.

The protagonist of the novel recounts a longer period of her life than in *Nilda:* Lydia, the narrator of Felices días..., recalls her life with her brother and male cousins from childhood throughout university and young adulthood. The questioning and scrutinizing of traditional roles and attitudes towards class and race are combined with a concern for the "place" of women in Puerto Rican society, a concern that is apparent from the opening pages of the novel in which the limitations imposed on women regarding what is appropriate, both in terms of her own family's attitudes and that of the larger society, are put into question:

> No era que mi mamá no fuera femenina, sino que le gustaba pararse como las garzas. Y todos los días, al atardecer, cuando nos llevaban de paseo a la orilla del mar, acabábamos mirando al horizonte, en la playa al otro lado del Fortín San Gerónimo, bajo las palmas de coco y los pinos australianos y Mami se paraba en un solo pie, con el otro puesto en la rodilla del que la sostenía, y nosotros dos imitándola, balanceándonos tras ella en un solo pie, en una sola dirección, retábamos al mundo, al buen gusto y a la familia, mirando el sol caer, parados en fila como las garzas de río de los documentales. (1)

The historical perspective is also given emphasis throughout the work; from the beginning as we are told that *"Era en los tiempos de Muñoz Marín,"* and it is clear that the capitalization and modernization of the island in the 1950s would parallel the changes and mental growth of the protagonist. How "self" is formed and deformed in the process of Puerto Rico's own "growing pains" is traced in the pages of the text.

In a recent essay in the collection *El tramo ancla: ensayos puertorriqueños de hoy,* García Ramis gives us an insight into her perspective of the role of literature as chronical and testimony, a role that is fulfilled in *Felices días*... which is a testimony of her generation's quest for cultural consciousness and identity.

> El artista gráfico Antonio Martorell repite incesantemente a todo el que quiera escucharle, que en América Latina todos debiéramos escribir crónicas. Crónicas como recuentos de la vida cotidiana, o de sucesos históricos, culturales, políticos, pero desde el ángulo intimista y particular que sólo la crónica puede dar. El recomienda esta actividad literaria porque considera que otros tipos de escritura, ya sea la periodística o la narrativa tradicional, no pueden jamás transmitir la realidad mayor, la personalísima, de los hechos y la vida de un pueblo.[22]

In this same essay, García Ramis claims that Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus* (1982) is a type of chronical, *"espejo de la vida vivida y antesala de la*

vida por venir,"[23] and considers the feminine viewpoint of the novel an ideal method for studying women's struggles. This combination of fiction/testimony/feminine perspective can perhaps best describe García Ramis' work which, despite its singular protagonist-narrator, is more a collective story than an individual one. While some have claimed that women's interest in the *Bildungsroman* as a genre reflects a desire to universalize female personal history, *Felices días*...appears to want to legitimize a group history narrated from the perspective of a female child.

The idea of "family" assumes various dimensions in this work. In most novels of this genre, the immediate family members traditionally play an influential and fundamental role in the development and growth of the protagonist, and this work is no exception. Lydia describes a sheltered existence in the confines of a feminine world, a female domain in which *"todo era organizado, ideado y llevado a cabo por mujeres."* The women in *"este hogar sin hombres"* (her brother is still only a boy) are urban, middle-class, educated and, with few exceptions, professional. Unlike the typical portrayal of North American women in the 1950s as dependent housewives, nor like the portrayal of Nilda's mother in Mohr's novel, bogged down by a lack of formal education and opportunity, the household of women in *Felices días*...are productive and active female workers with a secure economic status: doctors, nurses, secretaries, technicians. The novel reflects a more accurate reality of these years as described by Edna Acosta Belén in *La mujer en la sociedad puertorriqueña:*

> Uno de los cambios más evidentes en el estado de las mujeres en el Puerto Rico moderno, es el número substancial de mujeres que se benefician del sistema educativo a todos los niveles y su participación en una variedad de ramas profesionales...un gran número de mujeres puertorriqueñas han aprovechado las oportunidades educativas disponibles, y...su participación ha sido más amplia que en otros países latinoamericanos.[24]

The exceptions in the novel are the matriarchal grandmother Mamá Sara, a firm and resolute character who keeps the home in order, and the servant, Micaela, whose working class origins contrast with the middle class status of the family. Although there are male family members who live outside of the household, the protagonist frequently comments on their limited impact on her daily life : *"no había ningún hombre que estableciera su ritmo de vida y su modo de varón junto a nosotros, o que marcara nuestro mundo "* (12).

The intensely closed atmosphere of the household and the isolation of the children contrasts greatly with *Nilda:* in Mohr's work the young girl has more freedom and more contact with the neighborhood and the outside world, despite the greater possibility of physical harm in her ghetto world. The dangers in *Felices días...* are less physical than ideological: there is an "us" versus "them" mentality which is clearly defined and transmitted to the children as part of their social stratification and identification as members of a particular socio-economic class.

Lydia's training in social class distinction includes the identification of unacceptable social elements: those persons with differences based on economic status, race and radical political ideas. The children are warned, for example, against "la Margara," the daughter of a local nationalist: *"Nos habían explicado que la Margara era una mujer callejera, mala; y entendíamos sin entender que hacía cosas que uno no se podía imaginar.... Nunca le habíamos visto tan de cerca. Nunca su cara tan linda, sus ojos de almendra, sus labios como en puchero, su olor de mujer, ya identificado por nosotros como olor de mujer de pueblo"* (3–4). La Margara represents a threat not only because of her attraction to the male sex, but also, and more importantly, because she is

the daughter of a *"nacionalista"* whose political ideas jeopardize the social order as perceived by the protagonist's conservative family. Although the political affiliations of her family members vary from the strongly pro-North American to those who side with Muñoz Marín's Partido Popular, nationalists or those who advocated political independence for the Island were definitely on the list of *"los del lado del mal."* The young girl's ideological education is succinctly summarized:

> Estaba implícito en la Vida misma, que había un Bien y un Mal, y se dijera abiertamente o de sosla/o, sabíamos que a toda acción, persona e idea se le pasaba juicio en nuestra familia a la luz de ese Bien y ese Mal.
>
> Del lado del Bien estaban la religión Católica, Apostólica y Romana, el Papa, Estados Unidos, los americanos, Eisenhower, Europa, sobre todo los europeos finos, Grace Kelly, la gente preferiblemente blanca, todos los militares, Franco, Evita Perón, la ópera, la zarzuela, todos los productos de España desde la manzanilla hasta los chorizos y Sarita Montiel, y absolutamente todo lo germano y suizo, desde el vino del Rin hasta los relojes cucú.
>
> Del lado del Mal estaban los comunistas, los ateos, los masones, los protestantes, los nazis, las naciones recién formadas por negros en Africa (porque derramaban sangre europea y mataban hermanitas de la caridad), los nacionalistas e idependentistas puertorriqueños, el mambo, Trujillo, Batista y María Felix, pájara mala culpable de que Jorge Negrete estuviera en el Infierno. (28–29)

To this list is added the concept of good and bad in terms of racial distinction and the usual stereotypical attitudes towards blacks by middle-class whites.

> —Espérese Mamá, déjeme explicarle—dijo Nati. Y nos contaron por ochocientoava vez cómo los hijos de blancos y negros nunca podrían ser felices.
>
> —Los blancos no los aceptarían porque no son blancos.
>
> —Los negros no los quieren con ellos porque son más blancos que ellos.
>
> —Es tristísimo. Imagínate si tú tuvieras un bebé con pelo malo, cuando vas a acariciarle la cabecita, no puedes porque la mano se te enreda en el pelo.
>
> —Además no se dan saludables porque la sangre de los blancos es distinta de la de los negros. (113–114)
>
> —Hoy día es difícil saber quién tiene raja porque se estiran el pelo y se ponen blanquín. Por eso me preocupa la cubana esa.
>
> —Sí, pero siempre huelen a polvo o perfume de lilas, ese olor les encanta.
>
> —¿Tú sabes como uno puede detectar si alguien es negro o tiene raja? Por el talón. Sí, el talón, eso nos lo explicó Bueso en la Universidad, los negros tienen el talón más angosto, más musculoso. (115)

The European ideal of beauty and goodness is contrasted with superstition and prejudice regarding Blacks creating a distinction based on color and race. The text therefore challenges the concept of *"la gran familia puertorriqueña"* by demonstrating the contradictory values inculcated in the youth who esteem European elements of the culture and disparage that which is African and Latin American. It imputes as well the ideal of a unified, homogeneous Puerto Rican culture. The text brings to mind Arcadio Díaz Quiñones' study of Tomás Blanco's essay, *"El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico,"* a "patriarchal and paternalistic" discourse, according to Díaz Quiñones, of Puerto Rican identity whose unexpressed agenda was the reduction of racial and class conflict on the Island:

El discurso de Blanco afronta el problema reproduciendo el altruismo paternalista de la "gran familia" puertorriqueña, y, sobre todo, postulando el esencialismo de la "identidad" puertorriqueña. "Nuestra cultura general", escribe en *El prejuicio racial,* "es blanca, occidental, con muy pocas y ligerísimas influencias no españolas". Por eso, afirma, se ha llegado a un grado de "civilizada convivencia racial". Nuestra "población de color", agrega, "está completamente hispanizada culturalmente."

Estas son las tesis centrales de *El prejuicio racial:* un paradigma de armonía bajo la supremacía altruista de la hispanidad, una versión de la historia que borra los conflictos y postula la convivencia pacífica, borrando también la historia misma de los subordinados.[25]

The young girl's gradual awakening to the outside "family" and her role in the society in which she lives is central to the development of the novel. The final chapters present a resolution of the concept of family-society-culture from a wider and more complex perspective. Her growing emotional separation from her immediate family, one objective measure of maturity and growth, parallels her developing sense of identification with *all* the Puerto Rican people: *"Para Quique y para mí el descubrirnos como puertorriqueños nos dio cohesión, nos permitió ubicar todo lo que habíamos comenzado a aprender, nos dio una identidad con la realidad cotidiana del mundo que vivíamos y nos hermanó, por primera vez, con gente que no era de nuestra familia sanguínea sino de otra familia más amplia, más grande, toda nuestra"* (152).

The awakening social consciousness of the narrator is given a jolt by the arrival of Tío Sergio into the closed, traditional domain of the mothers. The male presence in the life of the young girl raises her cultural consciousness as the character of Tío Sergio, with his patriotic and nationalistic ideas, his marginal status and his unconventional ways, offers the young girl an element of choice. Whereas the usual turning points in the Bildungsroman novel include birth and death, sexual experiences and family crisis, in this work the arrival of a character which represents a non-traditional male figure is the catalyst that provides the young female with the opportunity for a new model and a truly distinct path from that proposed by her mother and female family members.

The character Tío Sergio, for example, opens up a world of art and literature to the children that is not colored by the family's pro-European bias. As a male, the family tolerates his friendship with the nationalist Don Gabriel and his daughter, la Margara; the young protagonist envies his ability to choose his friends and his ideals freely, growing more and more curious about the male world and male "secrets." Tío Sergio's unconventional ideas are perceived very gradually, however, as a threat by the family who allow him his ways but isolate him from the children: *"Años después cuando les cuestionamos, mi familia negó que hubiesen condicionado la relación de Tío Sergio con nosotros a que no nos hablara nunca de cosas de Puerto Rico, pero creemos que sí, porque no volvió a hablarnos jamás de ningún prócer, ni nosotros a preguntarle"* (60).

Of particular interest in this novel is the role of the male figure in developing the female consciousness of the young girl. Although the emphasis in the book appears to lie in the character's role as a catalyst for the growing political and social consciousness of the child, the final chapters of the work (in which the narrator, now a young woman, recalls her feelings for her uncle) reveal his function in her emotional development as well. This is all the more complicated by the fact that Tío Sergio is a male whose androgenous qualities marginalize him from the other males in the work.

Upon his arrival in the household, for example, there is a hint of "differ-

ence" in his physical description of *"ojos enormes, de pestañas largas casi de mujer;"* his artistic sensibilities and his independent political ideas also separate him from the mainstream of the family. In addition, Tío Sergio is sexually impotent as Lydia painfully discovers when she secretly observes his futile and frustrating attempt to have sexual relations with the willing servant, Micaela. And in the final chapter, when Lydia and her aunt go to New York to claim his body for burial on the Island, they discover that he had been not only a militant political activist but also:

> [E]l fue un paria, un inconforme y, probablemente, un homosexual. Pero Tía Ele lo trajo conmigo acá y lo enterramos en la fosa familiar porque, como dijo ella, "No importa qué él haya sido, él fue un hombre muy sufrido y no lo íbamos a dejar sólo en Nueva York, porque él era uno de nosotros." Entendí entonces un poco más cómo era la vida, y cuánto nos queríamos en mi familia.(155)

As we trace the process of increasing self-awareness in the female protagonist of *Felices días...*, the influence of feminist ideas becomes apparent. As in other novels of self-discovery by women authors, this work is also characterized by the belief that female identity can only be realized through a process of separation from a patriarchal society; in this case, the separation involves a critical rejection of those elements which are seen as either unauthentic or prejudicial to the protagonist's developmental needs. *Felices días...* represents a contemporary feminist perspective of the *Bildungsroman* in its suggestion that female identity and awakening consciousness can provide the impulse for alternative forms of living which can develop into oppositional forces to existing social and cultural values. Similar to other feminist examples of the genre, identity is defined primarily through gender, and development and growth require a process of separation from and opposition to the male sphere through the assertion of difference. Thus, for example, Lydia frequently expresses her resentment of the limitations placed on her due to her sex and envies the greater freedom of males to make choices in her patriarchal world. She also expresses a growing feminist solidarity with women and the weaker members of society:

> —Tú eres una mujer y no se supone que hagas nada. Las mujeres tienen que ser limpias. Tú nunca te vas a conseguir novio, nunca te vas a poder casar si no eres limpia. Al padre no le va a gustar que sepas de sexo o mires revistas o hagas nada. Capaz que se lo dice a Mami y a Tía Ele.
>
> Y mi mundo se cayó. Andrés me estaba haciendo un favor al decirme todo esto, y era cierto. Los varones, porque tenían "el lobo por dentro" como decía Sara F., cometían faltas a la pureza pero no podían evitarlo. En cambio las mujeres éramos solo viciosas porque Dios sí nos había dado la fuerza y la gracia divina para aguantar la tentación ya que no éramos como los hombres, no teníamos la urgencia del lobo por dentro. Yo, era una viciosa. No quería decírmelo a mí misma pero eso era lo que yo era...
>
> Yo celebré, sintiendo por dentro que pasaba al reino de los Malos, los mentirosos, los que habían cometido pecados tan abominables que podrían resultar en la excomunión. Yo excomulgada de la Gracia Divina, lo sabía, yo para siempre fuera de los BUENOS, de los JUSTOS, de los LIMPIOS, de los CATOLICOS, de mi FAMILIA. Yo, en liga entonces y quizás para siempre con los parias, los distintos ¿con el Tío Sergio? ¿Le habría pasado algo así a él? (89–90)

Her identification with Tío Sergio should not be interpreted as a violation of the feminist developmental process

of differentiation from the patriarchal sphere: Tío Sergio is, after all, not portrayed here as a patriarchal figure and is as much an outsider as are the children. The heroine's identification with this character does not diminish her rebellion against the world of her family, but is an integral part of that rebellion. Nor does she reject or disparage the mother—the female—to emulate and admire the male. Rather she perceives that there are elements in the character of Tío Sergio that are lacking or repressed in herself and, as feminist psychological theorists have observed in the female developmental process, she simply adds him to her world. The protagonist's self-discovery is a educational process that occurs in this interaction between self and the larger society represented by the character of Tío Sergio, who is the mediating link between the individual character of Lydia and Puerto Rican society as a whole. Interestingly, it is the character of a politically outcast and sexually marginalized male who provides the dialectical interaction that is needed between the developing interior world of the young girl and the social forces that profoundly affect her consciousness. It must be emphasized that the protagonist's maturation in this work does not simply involve an individual change of consciousness; the heroine's emotional and psychological self-development transcends into an increased political awareness as the young woman explores her cultural history and those elements of Puerto Rican culture which were repudiated or ignored in her typically middle-class education. In the final chapters, Lydia explains this process to her uncle who no longer lives with the family:

> Y entonces pensé que cuando tú volvieras yo iba a saber tus canciones, las que nunca me dijiste que te gustaban porque nunca nos hablaste de eso, aunque sabíamos que escuchabas muy bajito en tu habitación WKVM, la estación de las sirvientas, como decía Sara F. Intuí que eran canciones puertorriqueñas, o al menos latinas las tuyas, y decidí aprender todas las que pudiera. ¿Quieres que te diga cuántas?, todos los boleros, toda la música jíbara que oía por radio, los aguinaldos, las plenas de Concepción y su orquesta, y las danzas, toda esa música que mi familia rechazaba porque preferían escuchar pasodobles españoles y canciones de películas americanas, pero que yo ponía en el tocadiscos de la sala defendiendo mi derecho a prepararme para ti hasta que me compraron una victrolita portátil para que me fuera con mi música a otra parte. . . . (147)

> Para ellos no era en absoluto importante definir los linderos de su identidad; para Quique y para mí era vital, porque todo estaba cambiando constantemente. Con todas nuestras contradicciones, sin saber aún dónde quedaba Moca o cómo se bailaba una danza, íbamos a círculos de estudio, comprábamos libros de historia y poesía puertorriqueña, soñábamos con descubrir yacimientos de indios taínos, pegábamos pasquines que anunciaban marchas, y marchábamos lentamente en búsqueda de nuestra puertorriqueñidad. (153)

Thus the heroine's passage from young girl to young woman is profoundly affected by a male, who represents at once father and mentor, teacher and imaginary lover, on whom she places her love and trust. His departure from the household and his return to New York is, on the one hand, a rejection and a betrayal; the distancing between them, however, offers her the opportunity for introspection and analysis which lead, eventually, to a resolution that follows in the contemporary mode of the feminist *Bildungsroman*: rather than total social integration, the female character develops integrity and independence. Lydia forges a new, enlightened relationship with her immediate family, while her arduously-

gained self-knowledge creates a strength and a demythified basis for future negotiations between herself and her society.

Despite obvious differences in socio-economic class and historical experiences, the novels by Mohr and García Ramis offer interesting insights into the complexities of "growing up puertorriqueña." Both novels expose social contradictions with regard to women that begin in the early stages of development, particularly with regard to the limitations placed on young women and their restricted role in society. That these norms are basically the same in both works reflects the fact that emigrated Puerto Ricans continue, for the most part, to follow island traditions with respect to patriarchal attitudes towards women.

Similarly, in both novels a more positive mother-daughter relationship is presented in comparison to contemporary Anglo-American and European women's novels. In the latter, the female protagonists rebel against mothers who stress subservience for their daughters to the traditional domestic role for women. In *Nilda*, however, the young girl sympathizes with her mother and learns from her mistakes when she is advised to value herself and her authenticity above all else. And in *Felices días, Tío Sergio*, despite Lydia's mother's attempts to mold her into a conventional middle-class lady, the example of the women in the household conveys a different message: the women are professional, productive members of society, independent and unencumbered by male dominance. Their own autonomy and strength is a more potent influence than their words.

The importance of the home as refuge is also similar in both novels. In *Nilda*, home is a refuge from the hostile, alien Anglo world outside the barrio and represents as well the preservation of culture and stability essential to the protagonist's development. In *Felices días, Tío Sergio* the home is even more significant: it represents Lydia's consciousness, collective memory, and a nourishing structure in which Lydia comes into a sense of her own being. When the family decides to follow the social trend of the times and move into a modern home in an *"urbanización"* or development, Lydia realizes that the family house is an essential part of herself that she is unable to leave totally behind. The house also represents a lifestyle that, due to the profound socioeconomic transformations in her society, would soon disappear.

> Un día tomé la guagua y me bajé frente a la calle Las Villas. Caminé rumbo a nuestra casa y cuando la ví se me enfrió todo el cuerpo, como desde adentro, del corazón. Era sólo un caparazón sin techo, un esqueleto. Le habían ido quitando todas las paredes, puertas y ventanas con cuidado, madero a madero, viga a viga porque íbamos a construir una casa en el campo con las maderas que no tuviesen polilla. Ya habían tumbado todos los árboles, las conejeras, el gallinero, el garaje y las escaleras de atrás. Me di cuenta entonces de que la quería, de que ese era mi hogar, que nunca la dibujé y no podría visualizarla completa jamás, que no podría encontrar nunca los huesos de la Negri, que no habría ya rastro tuyo en este país, que mi vida se había cortado en mitad y todo sería medido de ahora en adelante por los tiempos de la Casa de Antes y los tiempos de la Casa de Ahora. (147–48)

Additionally, in both works the conclusion is not so much an ending as a beginning; there are no answers offered, no pat resolutions to conflict, but rather the initiation of another stage of life which is undertaken with the strength and insight needed for the journey. Although she had lost her mother and her step-father, Nilda had gained her art and, with her mother's soulful advice, the courage to deviate from the existing norms for young

Latina girls. Lydia's last words are in gratitude to Tío Sergio for *"todo lo que despertó en nosotros,"* a collective expression of indebtedness to those members of Puerto Rican society who, often at great personal sacrifice, had struggled to preserve an authentic vision of Puerto Rican culture.

Becoming Puerto Rican for Lydia and her generation on the island took effort and hard work in an atmosphere in which all the social and educational forces were intent on their assimilation to the North American culture. For Nilda and the Puerto Rican population in the U.S. she represents, the choices are analogous: being a Puerto Rican is an essential element of her emotional and social development, but assimilation is promoted by the educational institutions that she experiences on the mainland. For Nilda, however, the alternatives are fewer: if Lydia and her friends on the island made a conscious decision to develop and strengthen their Puerto Rican identity, the Anglo society imposes "Puerto Ricanness" on Nilda and her community. For Puerto Rican people of color in the United States, assimilation into the mainstream remains an option that is more of an ideal for some than a reality for the majority.

A comparison of the two novels reveals, therefore, that both on the island and on the mainland, a true understanding of the reality of becoming a Puerto Rican implies a struggle to move beyond the negative cultural stereotypes, and, in Lydia's works, beyond a "colonized" mentality, to a more authentic vision of cultural identity from which one is then able to derive strength and a positive self-awareness. Far from accommodation to the existing society, as is usually the case in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the female protagonists in these works must distinguish between those elements of the social order that they should accept or reject in their quest for meaningful existence. "Growing up puertorriqueña," therefore, on the Island or on the mainland, denotes a life that is molded by an intense cultural consciousness and an arduous quest in the pursuit of integrity and the creation of an authentic self. ❑

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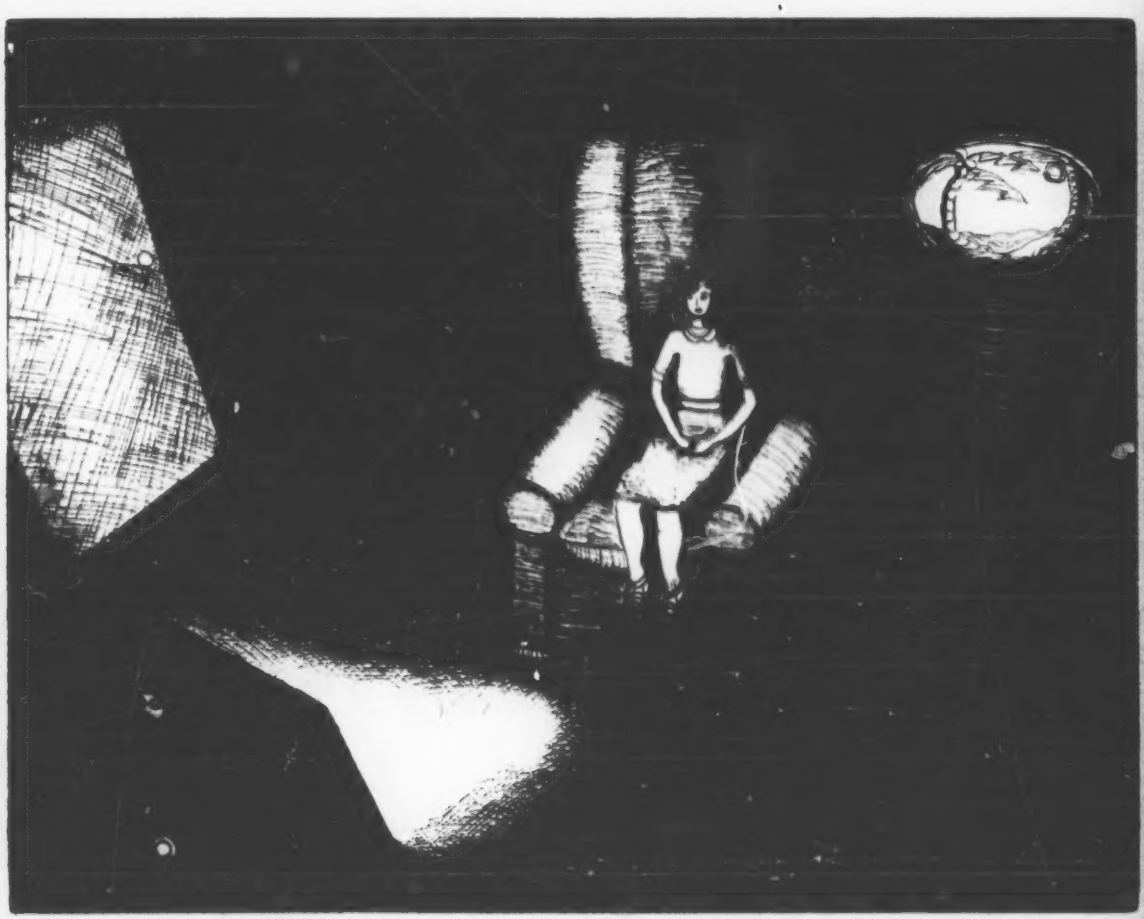
PORTFOLIO

Elaine Soto

"As a clinical psychologist and artist my goal is to make the unconscious conscious for myself and others. I use dream, meditation, memory and other images to better know myself and others. My artwork is theraputic and freeing for me and I hope others who identify with it will also find it so."



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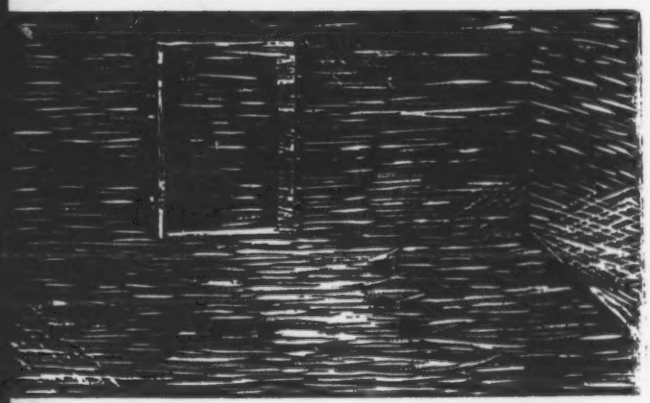
1 "Waiting," Etching, 20" x 26", 1985
2 "The Door," Linocut, 10" x 15", 1989
3 "The Coming," Woodcut on rice paper, 12" x 19", 1988



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The Four Girls

Julia Alvarez

The mother still calls them *the four girls* even though the youngest is twenty-seven and the oldest will be thirty-three next month. She has always called them *the four girls* for as long as they can remember, and the oldest remembers all the way back to the day the fourth girl was born. Before that the mother must have called them *the three girls*, and before that *the two girls*, but not even the oldest, who was once the only girl, remembers the mother calling them anything but *the four girls*.

She dressed them all alike in smaller and different color versions of what she wore, so that the husband sometimes joked, calling them *the five girls*. No one really knew if the father was secretly displeased in his heart of hearts that he had never had a son, but the father always bragged, "Good bulls father cows," and the mother patted his arm, and the four girls tumbled and skipped and giggled and raced by in yellow and pink and pastel blue and white, and strangers counted them, "One, two, three, four girls! No sons?"

"No," the mother apologized. "Just the four girls."

Each of the four girls had the same party dress, school clothes, underwear, toothbrush, bedspread, nightgown, plastic cup, towel, brush and comb

set as the other three, but the first girl brushed in yellow, the second one boarded the school bus in pink, the third one slept in blue, and the baby did everything she pleased in white. As the baby got older, she cast an envying look at pink. The mother tried to make the switch by convincing the second daughter that white was the best color, and the little one wanted pink because she was a baby and didn't know any better, but the second girl was clever and would not be persuaded. She had always believed that she had gotten the best deal since pink was the color for girls. "You four girls are going to drive me crazy!" the mother said, but the girls were used to the mother's rhetorical threats.

The mother had devised the color code to save time. With four girls so close in age, she couldn't indulge identities and hunt down a red cowboy shirt when the youngest turned tomboy or a Mexican peasant blouse when the oldest discovered her hispanic roots. As women, the four girls criticized the mother's efficiency. The little one claimed that the whole color system smacked of an assembly line mentality. The eldest, a child psychologist, admonished the mother in an autobiographical paper, *I Was There Too*, by saying that the color system had weakened the four girls' identity differentiation abilities and made them unclear about personality boundaries. The eldest also intimated that the mother was a mild anal retentive personality.

The mother did not understand all that psychology talk, but she knew she was being criticized. The next time the four girls were all together, she took the opportunity of crying a little and saying that she had done the best she could by the four girls. All four girls praised the good job the mother had done in raising four girls so close in age, and they poured more wine into the mother's glass and into the father's glass, and the father patted the mother's arm and said thickly, "Good cows mother cows," and the mother told the story she liked to tell about the oldest.

For although the mother confused their names and their birth dates and their careers and sometimes forgot which husband or boyfriend went with which daughter, she had a favorite story she liked to tell about each one as a way of celebrating that daughter on special occasions. The last time she told the story she liked to tell about the eldest was when the eldest got married. The mother, tipsy on champagne, seized the mike during the band's break and recounted the story of the red sneakers to the wedding guests. After her good cry at the dinner table, the mother repeated the story. The eldest, of course, knew the story well and had analyzed it for unresolved childhood issues with her husband who was an analyst, but she never tired of hearing it because it was her story, and whenever the mother told it, the eldest knew she was the favorite of the moment.

"You know, I'm sure, the story of the red sneakers?" the mother asked the table in general.

"Oh no," the second daughter groaned. "Not again."

The eldest glared at her. "Listen to the negativity." She nodded at her husband as if to confirm something they had talked about.

"Listen to that jargon," the second one countered, rolling her eyes.

"Listen to my story." The mother sipped from her wine glass and set it down a little too heavily. Wine spilled on the back of her hand. "You all know that when we were first married, we were really really poor?" The father nodded, he remembered. "And your sister—" the stories were always told as if the daughter they were about were not present—"your sister

wanted some new sneakers. She drove me crazy, night and day, she wanted sneakers, she wanted sneakers. Anyhow, with four girls to support and your father still in school, we couldn't afford one little frill. Oh, if you girls only knew what we went through in those days. Words can't describe it. Four girls and no money coming in."

"Well," the father interrupted. "I was working nights."

"Your father was working nights." The mother frowned. Once she started a story, she did not acknowledge interruptions. "But that measly little paycheck barely covered the rent." The father frowned. "And my father," the mother confided "was helping us out—"

"It was only a loan," the father explained to his son-in-law. "Paid every penny back."

"It was only a loan," the mother continued. "Anyhow, the point is, to make a long story short, we did not have money for one little frill, like sneakers. Well, she drove me crazy, night and day, I want sneakers, I want sneakers." The mother was a poor mimic, but everybody had had too much wine and laughed. The oldest daughter's husband rubbed the back of her neck in slow, arousing circles.

"But the good Lord always provides." Although she was not particularly religious, the mother liked to make her plots providential. "It just so happened that a very nice lady lived down the block with a little girl who was a little older than your sister and much bigger."

"Much bigger." The father blew out his cheeks and spread his arms out.

"And the little girl's grandmother had sent her some sneakers for her birthday, and they didn't fit her."

The father kept his cheeks puffed out. Every time she looked over at him, the youngest daughter giggled. She never held her liquor well.

The mother waited for her to control herself and gave the father a sobering stare. "So the nice lady offers me the sneakers because she knows how much your sister has been pestering me that she wants some. And you know what?" The table waited for the mother to enjoy answering herself. "They were just her size. Always provides," the mother nodded.

"But young miss could not be bothered with white sneakers. She wanted red sneakers, she wanted red sneakers. Can you believe it!" The mother rolled her eyes the same way that the second daughter had rolled her eyes.

"I can believe it," the second daughter said.

"Hostile, aren't we?" the eldest said. Her husband whispered something in her ear. They laughed.

"Let me finish," the mother said.

The third eldest got up and poured everyone some more wine. The youngest turned her glass stem up. She giggled without enthusiasm when the father puffed out his cheeks again for her benefit.

"I told your sister, *It's white sneakers or no sneakers*! And she had some temper, that one. She threw them across the room and yelled, *red sneakers, red sneakers*."

The four girls shifted in their chairs. The eldest daughter's husband fondled her shoulder as if it were a breast.

The mother hurried her story. "So your father, who spoiled you all rotten—" the father grinned from his place at the head of the table—"comes and rescues the sneakers and behind my back, whispers to her that she's

going to have red sneakers just like she wants them. So, I find them, mind you, the both of them on the floor in the bathroom with my nail polish painting those sneakers red!"

"To Mother," the father said sheepishly, lifting his glass in a toast. "And to the red sneakers," he added.

The room rang with laughter. The daughters raised their glasses, "To the red sneakers."

"That's classic," the analyst said, winking at his wife.

"Red sneakers at that," the eldest shook her head, stressing the word *red*.

"Jesus!" the second oldest groaned.

"Always provides," the mother added.

"Red sneakers," the father said, trying to get one more laugh from the table. But everyone was tired, and the youngest said she thought she was going to throw up.

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The second of the four girls became a school teacher but not on purpose. For years after she took a job at Meeks Academy, she wrote down *poet* under profession in applications and questionnaires, and later amended it to writer/teacher. Finally, recognizing that she had not written anything in three years, she announced to her family that she was not a poet anymore.

Secretly, the mother was sad because she had always meant for the second one to be famous. The story she told about this daughter no longer had the charm of a prophetic ending: "And, of course, she became a poet." But the mother tried to convince her daughter that it was better to be a happy nobody than a sad somebody. The daughter who was still as clever as when the mother had tried to persuade her that white was a better color than pink was not convinced.

The mother used to go to all the poetry readings the second daughter gave and sit in the front row applauding each poem and giving standing ovations. The daughter was so embarrassed that she kept her readings to herself, but the mother always found out about them and appeared, first row, center. Even when she behaved herself, she threw her daughter off just by her presence, for the daughter often read poems addressed to lovers or set in bedrooms, and she knew the mother did not believe in sex for girls. But the mother seemed not to notice the subject of the poems or, if she did, to ascribe the love scenes to the daughter's great imagination.

"That one has always had a great imagination," the mother confided to whoever sat next to her. At the last reading the daughter gave before she went silent because she had nothing new to read, the mother's neighbor was the daughter's lover. The mother, of course, did not realize that the handsome, greying professor at her side knew her daughter at all; she thought he was just someone interested in poetry. "Of all the four girls," the mother told the lover, "that one has always loved poetry."

"I'm the mother," the mother explained, "and they're four girls."

"Really?" the lover said although he already knew all about the family. The parents were old-fashioned. They would not approve of his divorce when it came through. There were four girls. The oldest was a child psychologist or analyst or something. Another had just married a Danish man when they discovered she was pregnant. The youngest was a sufi who slept around.

"But that one," the mother continued, pointing to her daughter where she sat with the other readers waiting for the sound system to work properly so the program could begin, "that one has always had a great imagination." The buzz of talk was punctuated now and then by a sharp, amplified "testing" spoken too closely into the microphone. The daughter watched the absorbed conversation of her mother and lover with growing uneasiness.

"Yes, that one has always loved poetry. Why I remember the time we went to New York. She couldn't have been more than three." The mother was warming to her story. The lover noticed that the mother's eyes were those that looked at him softly at night from the daughter's face.

"Testing," a voice exploded in the room.

The mother looked up, thinking the poetry reading had begun. The lover waved the voice away; he wanted to hear the story.

"We went up to New York, Eddie and I. He had a convention there, and we decided to make a vacation of it. We hadn't had a vacation since the four girls were born. We were very poor." The mother lowered her voice. "Words can't describe how poor we were! But we were starting to see better days."

"Really?" the lover said. He had fixed on that word as one that gave the appropriate amount of encouragement but did not interrupt the flow of the mother's story.

"We left the girls with my mother, but that one— "the mother pointed again to the daughter, who widened her eyes at her lover— "that one was losing all her hair. We took her with us so she could see a specialist. Turned out to be just nerves."

The lover was embarrassed for the daughter because he knew she would not want him to know about this moment of physical weakness. She did not even like to pluck her eyebrows in his presence. She had a little of the prude in her that, when they were happy together, he liked to call, *a kind of saintliness.*

"We got on this crowded bus one afternoon." The mother shook her head remembering how crowded the bus had been. "I couldn't begin to tell you how crowded it was. It was like sardines in a can."

"Really?"

"You don't believe me?" the mother accused him. The lover nodded his head to show he was convicted. "But let me tell you, that bus was so crowded, Eddie and I got our wires crossed. Eddie thought I had her, I thought Eddie had her. Anyhow, to make a long story short, we got off our stop, and we looked at each other. *Where is she?* we asked at the same time. Meanwhile, that bus was roaring away."

"Well, I'll tell you, we broke into a run like two crazy people! It was rush hour. Everyone was turning around to look at us." The mother's voice was tired and breathless remembering that run. The lover waited for her to catch up with the bus in her memory.

"Testing?" a garbled voice asked without much conviction.

"After about two blocks we flagged the driver down and climbed aboard. And you won't believe what we found?"

The lover knew better than to take a guess.

"We found that one, surrounded by a crowd like Jesus and the elders."

"Really?" he said, admiring the daughter from a distance. The lover, a professor of Classics, appreciated such Biblical allusions.

"She hadn't even realized we were gone. She had a circle of people listening to her reciting a poem! As a matter of fact, it was a poem I taught her. Maybe you've heard of it? It's by that guy who wrote that poem about the blackbird."

"Stevens?" the lover guessed.

The mother cocked her head. "I'm not sure. Anyhow," she continued, "Imagine! Three years old and already drawing crowds. Of course, she became a poet."

"You don't mean Poe, do you? Edgar Allen Poe?"

"Yes, that's him! That's him!" the mother cried out. "The poem was about a princess who lived by the ocean or something." She began to recite:

> Many years ago, something...something,
> In a ...something by the sea....
> A princess there lived whom you may remember
> By the name of Anabel Lee....

The mother looked up and realized that the hushed audience was staring at her. She blushed. The lover chuckled and squeezed her arm. At the podium, the daughter had been introduced and was waiting for white-haired woman in the first row to finish talking. "For Maynard," she introduced her first poem, *"Bedroom Sestina."* Maynard smiled at the mother who smiled, proudly, at her daughter.

The mother does not tell a favorite story about the youngest of the four girls anymore. She says she would like to forget the past, but it is really only a small part of the past she would like to forget. However, the mother knows people listen to absolute statements, so she says in a tired voice, "I want to forget the past."

The last story the mother told about the youngest was not in celebration but in explanation to Dr. Tandlemann, senior staff psychiatrist at Mount Hope. The mother explained why her husband and she were committing their daughter to a private mental hospital.

"It started with that crazy diet," the mother began. She folded and refolded her kleenex into smaller and smaller squares. Dr. Tandlemann watched her and took notes. The father sat by the window quietly and followed the movements of a gardener who was mowing first one, then another, dark swathe across the lawn.

"Can you imagine starving herself to death?" The mother pinched little bits of her kleenex. "No wonder she went crazy."

"She had a breakdown." Dr. Tandlemann looked at the father. "Your daughter is not clinically crazy."

"What does that mean, 'clinically crazy'?" The mother scowled. "I don't understand all that psychology talk."

"It means," Dr. Tandlemann explained, "that she's not psychotic or schizophrenic, she's just had a small breakdown."

"A small breakdown," the father murmured to himself. In the middle of a row, the gardener stopped, machine roaring. He spat and wiped his mouth by shrugging his shoulder across his lips, then he continued his progress across the lawn. Grass bits spewed into a white sack ballooning behind the motor. The father felt he should say something pleasant. "A nice place you

got here, beautiful grounds."

"Oh Eddie," the mother said sadly. She made a fist of what was left of her kleenex.

Dr. Tandlemann waited for a moment in case the father wanted to respond. Then he asked the mother, "You say it started with that diet she went on?"

"It started with that crazy diet," the mother said again as if she had just found her place in a book she had been reading. "She wanted to look like her three sisters. There are four girls you know?"

Dr. Tandlemann wrote down *four girls* although the father had already told him, this when he asked, "No sons?"

"The three oldest are small boned, dark. But this one, she was beautiful!" A big tall girl, blonde, peaches and cream, everything going for her!" The mother spread her arms in all directions to show how tall and blonde and beautiful the girl was. Bits of her kleenex fell to the floor. The mother picked off the specks from the carpet. "Eddie's great grandfather married a Swedish girl, you know?"

"My grandfather," father corrected her.

"Eddie's grandfather," the mother continued. "So the family has blonde blood, and the youngest got it all. But imagine, she wanted to look like her sisters."

"That's understandable," Dr. Tandlemann said.

"It's crazy, that's what it is," the mother said angrily. "When her sister got married to Otto, she wouldn't even taste the wedding cake, taste!"

"Did they get along?" Dr. Tandlemann glanced up; his hand had a life of its own and kept writing.

"Who?" the mother blinked in disapproval. The man asked too many questions.

"The siblings," Dr. Tandlemann said. "Were they close? Was there a lot of rivalry between them?"

"What has that got to do with anything?" The mother frowned. "They're sisters," she said by way of explanation.

"Sometimes they fought," the father added. Although he was looking out the window, he did not miss a word the Doctor and his wife said.

"Sometimes they fought," the mother raced on. She wanted to get to the end of this story. "So she lost a little weight; at first she looked good. She had been sort of plump, so a few pounds was okay. Then she went away to college, and I told Eddie, 'Eddie, something is wrong with that girl.' Every time we talked to her over the phone, her voice seemed further and further away. And it wasn't because it was long distance either. I can't explain it," the mother said.

"So one night we get a call at our hotel. Her Dorm Resident from Ohio. She says she does not want to alarm us, but could we come down immediately. Our daughter is in the hospital. She is too weak to do anything. All she does is read."

The father had timed the gardener's treks across the wide lawn. When he did not stop to spit or wipe his forehead, each row took him approximately three minutes.

The mother tried to open the kleenex in her lap, but it was too ragged to spread out. "We took the next plane, and when we got there, I didn't recognize my own daughter." The mother held up her little finger. "She was

a toothpick. And that's not the least of it, she wouldn't put a book down, read, read, read. That's all she did."

At the window the father's view of the lawn was blurring.

The mother looked over at her husband and wondered what he was thinking about. Then she continued, "She had lists and lists of books to read. We found them in her journal. When she finished one, she crossed it off the list. Finally, she told us why she was reading so much. She said she didn't have much time left. She had to read all the great works of man because soon," the mother got her courage up to say it, "soon she wouldn't be human."

In the ensuing silence the mother heard the drone of a distant lawn-mower.

"She told us that she was being turned out of the human race. She was becoming a monkey." The mother's voice broke. "A monkey... My baby, a monkey!"

"Already the other organs inside her body were a monkey's. Only her brain was left and she could feel it going."

Dr. Tandlemann stopped writing. He weighed the pen in his hand. "I understood you committed her only because of the weight loss. This is news to me."

"Small breakdown," the father murmured quietly so Dr. Tandlemann wouldn't hear him.

The mother was in control of her voice again. "If she read all the great books, maybe she'd remember something important from having been human. So she read and read. But she was afraid she'd go before she got to some of the big thinkers."

"Jung," the Doctor listed names on his pad, "Reich, Fingaretti, Plato."

"Dante," the father mused. "Homer, Cervantes, Shakespeare."

"I told her to stop reading so much and start eating. I told her those books were driving her crazy. I made her everything she liked: rice and beans, lasagna, chicken a la king. I made her favorite red snapper with tomato sauce. She didn't want to eat animals, she said."

"One morning I go in her room to wake her up and I find her lying in bed and looking up at her hands." The mother held up her hands and re-enacted the scene. "I call her name, and she keeps on turning her hands, this way, that, and staring at them. I scream at her to answer me, and she doesn't even look at me. Nothing. And she's making these awful sounds like she's a zoo." The mother clucked and grunted to show the Doctor what the animals had sounded like.

Suddenly, the father leaned forward. He had caught sight of something important.

"And she holds up her hands to me," the mother continued. She turned her hands towards Dr. Tandlemann and then towards her husband whose face was pressed up to the window. "And she screams, *monkey hands, monkey hands*."

The father shot up from his chair. Outside, a fair, willowy girl and a heavy-set woman in white were walking across the lawn. The woman was pointing out the flowers and the leaves of the bushes in order to cajole the girl forward towards the building. At one end of the lawn, the gardener wiped his forehead, turned the mower around and began a new row. A dark wake spread behind him. The girl looked up, wildly searching the empty

sky for the airplane she was hearing. The nurse followed her distracted movements with alarm. Finally, the girl saw a man coming at her with a roaring machine, its stomach-like bag swelling as it devoured the grasses between them. The girl screamed and broke into a panicked run towards the building where her father, whom she could not see, stood at the window, waving.

At the hospital the mother leans on the glass with one hand and taps with the other. She makes a monkey face. The cradle has been turned towards her, but the tiny, wrinkled baby is not looking at the grandmother. Instead the baby's eyes roll about as if she hadn't quite figured out how to work them yet. Her lips pucker and stretch. The grandmother is sure the baby is smiling at her.

"Look at that," the grandmother says to the young man at her side who is looking at the baby in the neighboring cradle.

The young man looks at the stranger's baby.

"She's smiling already," the grandmother brags.

The young man nods and smiles.

"Yours is asleep," the grandmother says in a slightly critical voice.

"Babies sleep a lot," the young man explains.

"Some do," the grandmother says. "I had four girls, and they never slept."

"Four girls, no boys?"

The mother shakes her head. "I guess it's in the blood. This one is a girl too. Aren't you?" the grandmother asks her granddaughter.

The young man smiles at his daughter. "Mine is a girl also."

The grandmother congratulates him. "Good bulls father cows."

"Huh?"

"It's a saying my husband always used to say to me after I had one of the girls. *Good bulls father cows*. I remember the night the third one was born." The grandmother looks down at her granddaughter and explains, "your mother."

The young man studies his baby daughter and tolerates the old woman's story.

"That girl gave me more trouble getting born than the first two. And the funny thing was she was the smallest of the three babies! Twenty-four hours in labor!" The grandmother's eyebrows lift for punctuation.

The man whistles. "Twenty-four hours is a long labor for a small third child. Any complications?"

The mother studies the young man and wonders if he is a doctor. He knows so much about babies. "But you know," she continues, "I was telling my husband the other night, *Eddie, she gave us all her trouble being born and got it all over and done with*. She hasn't been any trouble to us since."

"Twenty-four hours is long labor," the young man shakes his head. "Ours was nine and a half."

The grandmother stares up at the young man. Men! she thinks. Now they're going to claim having the babies too. Leave to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, she feels like telling him. But maybe she will offend him. Maybe he is Jewish and doesn't believe in the New Testament.

"Yes sir, she's a lucky one all right. She might look like she's headed for trouble, but it always turns out to be luck."

"That night she was finally born, her father came in, and I knew he was a little disappointed, especially after such a long wait, and I said, *I can't help it, they come out girls, and all he said was, Good bulls father cows.* He was almost falling over with exhaustion. So I sent him home to bed."

The young man yawns and laughs.

"He was so dead tired, he didn't hear the burglars when they broke in. They stole us blind. They even stole my shoes and my under..." The grandmother remembers it is indelicate to say so. "Every last article of clothing," she adds coyly.

The young man pretends to be alarmed.

"But this is what I mean about luck: they caught the burglars, and we got every last stitch back." The grandmother taps the glass. "Angel," she coos at the baby.

"Lucky," she says to the young man. "That one has always been the lucky one. Not to mention her luck with—" the grandmother lowers her voice—"with Otto."

The young man looks over his shoulder and wonders who Otto could be.

"Imagine," the grandmother continues, "she breaks up with her college sweetheart and goes off on a school trip to Peru, chaperoned, of course, by one of the teachers. Anyhow she meets this Danish man Otto in a Peruvian market who can't speak a word of Spanish but is trying to buy a poncho. She bargains for him and he gets his poncho for nothing. Well, just like that, they fell for each other, corresponded, and here they are, parents! Tell me that isn't lucky?"

"That's lucky," the young man says.

"And you're going to be a lucky one too, aren't you?" The grandmother clucks at her granddaughter, then she points out to the young man, "She's going to look just like her father, pink and blonde."

"You never can tell when they're this young," the father says, smiling at his daughter.

"I can," the grandmother claims. "I had four of them."

"Mother picks up these really gorgeous men," the youngest girl laughs. She sits cross-legged on the third daughter's living room floor. The two oldest are sprawled on the sofa. The new mother sits in Otto's recliner, the baby asleep on her shoulder. It is early morning. The family has gathered at the third daughter's house for Christmas, which falls a week after the baby's birth. Husbands and grandmother are still asleep in the bedrooms. The four girls lounge in their nightgowns and tell each other the truth of how their lives are going.

The youngest daughter explains that she and the mother were in the waiting room, and the mother disappeared. "I find her at the nursery window talking to this piece of beefcake—"

"That's offensive," the second oldest says, "just call him a man."

"Will you lay off me, please?" The youngest is close to tears. Since her release from Mt. Hope a month ago, she cries so easily she has to carry kleenex or valium in her purse. She looks around the room for her bag. "Touchy poet is so god-damn sensitive to language."

"I don't write poetry anymore," the second daughter says in a wounded voice.

"You do too!" the new mother reminds her: "How about the poem you wrote for the baby?" The second oldest says nothing. Her crochet needle flies furiously in and out of the baby blanket she is making. The new mother turns to her little sister and changes the subject. "That was really nice of you to come see me at the hospital. I know how you feel about hospitals."

The youngest picks at the rug. "I just want to forget the past, you know."

"That's understandable," the eldest says.

The second oldest is penitent. "I'm sorry. I guess I'm just on edge about Maynard—I mean, that's no excuse..." She lays aside the baby blanket. She wears the same scowl the youngest had on a moment ago, a family sign of approaching tears.

Her little sister forgives her. She touches the evolving blanket. "It's really beautiful," she says. "Isn't it?" she asked the new mother.

The new mother nods. "And that poem made me cry."

"You really have such a great imagination," the youngest says.

"You guys," the second oldest says. She tries to conceal her pleasure by crocheting a row of pink stitches with excessive concentration.

The oldest turns to the youngest daughter. "Mother says you've gone back to that group that..." The eldest weighs her words carefully, "whirls?"

"What of it?" The youngest looks up defensively, and then, realizing her sisters are not laughing at her, she adds, "They're called sufis."

"I've heard of them," the second daughter says supportively. She cuts the pink yarn off with her teeth.

"Tell us about this cute guy," the third oldest says, changing the subject again. This is the first reunion of all four sisters in three years; she wants them all to have a happy Christmas. Besides, she is avidly curious about anything having to do with her new daughter. "You met him at the nursery?"

"Me?" The youngest laughs. "Mother did! And she picks him up and invites him for lunch at the hospital coffee shop."

"Mother is so fresh," the second oldest says. She notices she has made a mistake and begins unraveling a lopsided yellow row.

The third daughter pats her baby's back. "And she complains about us!"

"So we all have lunch together," the youngest continues, "and Mother can't shut up about how God brought you and Otto together from opposite ends of the earth in Peru."

"Columbia," the third daughter says. "We met in Columbia."

"In mother's version of the story, you met in Peru," the youngest say. "And you fell in love at first sight."

"And made love the first night," the eldest teases. The four girls laugh. "Except that part isn't in mother's expurgated version," the eldest adds.

"I've heard so many versions of that story," the youngest says, "I don't know which one is true anymore."

"Neither do I," the third oldest laughs. "Otto says we probably met in a New York subway, but we've heard all these exciting stories about how we met in Brazil or Columbia or Peru that we got to believing them."

"Was it really the first night?" the second oldest asked, stopping her crochet needle mid-air.

"I heard the first night," the oldest says.

The youngest narrows her eyes. "I heard it was a week or so after you knew each other."

The baby burps. The four girls look at each other and laugh. "Actually," the third daughter calculates by lifting her fingers one by one from the baby's back, then patting them down, "it was on the fourth night. But I knew the minute I saw him."

"That you loved him?" the second oldest asks. She pulls blue yarn from a skein the youngest is winding slowly into a ball.

The third daughter nods. In the pause before someone picks up the thread of conversation, they listen to the baby's soft breathing.

"Anyhow, Mother tells this guy about your long correspondence." The youngest winds, stopping now and then to enjoy her story of the mother. "*For months and months after they met in Peru, they were separated, months and months.*" The youngest roll her eyes like her mother. She is a remarkably good mimic. Her three sisters laugh. "*Otto was doing his research in Denmark, but he wrote to her every day.*"

"Everyday." The third oldest laughs. "I wish it had been everyday. Sometimes I had to wait weeks between letters."

"But then," the second oldest says in the ominous voice of a radio melodrama, "then the fateful letter arrived."

"Mother don't mention the fateful letter," the youngest says. "The story was short and sweet. *He wrote to her ever day. Then he came to see her last Christmas, then he proposed, then they married this spring, and here they are parents.*"

"One, two, three, four," the eldest begins a countdown.

The third oldest grins. "Stop it," she says. "The baby was born exactly nine months and ten days after the wedding."

"Thank God for the ten days," the eldest says.

"Like Mother's version of the story," the third daughter laughs. "So she didn't bring me the letter?"

The youngest shakes her head. "Maybe she forgot it. You know how she keeps saying she wants to forget the past."

"Mother remembers everything," the oldest disagrees.

"Well, she had no business going through my personal mail," the third daughter snaps. The baby stirs on her shoulder. "She claims she was looking for a journal or something."

"Uh hum," the youngest daughter purses her lips.

The second daughter mimics the mother opening an envelope. Her eyes widen in burlesque horror. She clutches her throat. She even puts on a German accent to make the moment more dramatic. The second daughter is not a good mimic. "*What does his man mean,'Have you gotten your period yet?*'"

The youngest adds, "*What business is it of Otto's if you've gotten your period or no?*"

The baby begins to cry. "Oh, honey, it's just a story." The mother rocks her.

"*We disown you,*" the youngest mimics. "*You have disgraced the family. Out of this house!*"

"*Out of our sight!*" The second daughter points to the door. The youngest ducks the flailing crochet needle. A ball of white yarn rolls across the floor.

"You guys are really getting into this." The new mother walks the baby to sleep back and forth across the length of the room. "Nothing like a story to take the sting out of things," she adds coolly.

Her three sisters look at each other. They realize they have turned her love story into a melodrama.

"It must have been hard," the oldest sympathizes. "But they didn't really mean it. It's that old world stuff."

"I know, I know." The new mother looks at her baby and recovers her good mood. "Well, it all ended happily, that's what counts."

"Happily, forever after," the second adds. She thinks of Maynard and wishes he had not gotten back together with his wife. Then she could call him and read him her "Baby Villanelle" over the phone.

"I wish that cute guy hadn't been married," the youngest says.

"What cute guy?" the second daughter asks her.

"What guy?" the mother asks. She is standing at the entrance to the living room, buttoning down the pink houserobe she bought for her trip.

"The guy you picked up at the hospital," the youngest teases.

"What do you mean picked up? He was a nice young man, and it just so happens that he had a baby daughter born the same time as my little precious." The mother puts out her arms. "Come here, Angel." She takes the baby from her daughter's hands. She clucks into the blanket.

The youngest shakes her head. "God! You sound like a goddamn zoo!"

"Your language," the mother scolds absently, and then, as if the words were an endearment, she coos them at her granddaughter, "your language."

The men trail in slowly for breakfast. First, the father, followed by Otto, who wishes everyone a Merry Christmas. The analyst shuffles in last. "Look at all those women," he whistles.

The mother is walking her granddaughter up and down the length of the room.

"Just look at them." Otto grins. "A vision! What the three kings saw!"

"Five girls!" The father claps his hands.

"Six," the mother corrects him, nodding towards the bundle in her arms. "Six girls," she says to the baby. "And I was sure of it! Why a week before you were born, I had the strangest dream. We were all living on a farm, and a bull...."

The room is hushed with sleepiness. Everyone listens to the mother.

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Entre dominicanos:
Una lectura de "Las cuatro niñas"

Daisy Cocco De Filippis

María Herrera-Sobek, una de las editoras de *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: Charting New Frontiers in American Literature*, afirma que "la década de los ochenta ha visto una verdadera explosión en la producción literaria de las autoras chicanas." (Sobek-Viramontes: 9) Testimonian también de este hecho las antologías y los artículos de crítica sobre las chicanas que han visto la prensa en los últimos cinco años. Una situación parecida, aunque se trata de un número más reducido de autoras, es la que presenta Fernández Olmos en su *"From the Metropolis: Puerto Rican Women Poets and the Immigration Experience"*. Olmos afirma que aunque las autoras y los estudios no sean tantos,"podemos, sin embargo, observar una diversidad de estilos, temas y lenguaje que reflejan las diferencias en los antecedentes y experiencias de las mujeres estudiadas aquí"(*Third Woman, Looking East:* 50, tr.) No obstante, por limitado que se considere el número de estudios o por reducida que sea la circulación de los libros, ya existe un cuerpo literario y crítico que se puede llamar la literatura de las latinas en los Estados Unidos, y , en particular, la literatura de las chicanas y de las puertorriqueñas en los Estados Unidos.

Este no es el caso de la comunidad dominicana donde en estos momentos se debate el tema "candente" de si existe o no una literatura dominicana en el exilio. A pesar de que la dominicana es una de las últimas comunidades hispanas en establecerse en los Estados Unidos, y a pesar de las diversas interpretaciones de lo que se considera una literatura dominicana en el exilio, se puede afirmar sin temor que ha visto surgir un grupo de escritores que comienzan a bregar con los problemas del racismo, el lenguaje y la asimilación cultural. No obstante, la problemática de la dominicana, sujeta también a cambios radicales en su existencia, no se ha comenzado a discutir.

En un número reciente de la revista *Third Woman*, subtitulado *Texas and More*, aparece el cuento de Julia Alvarez *"Las cuatro niñas"*, cuyo estudio es el propósito de este trabajo. Curioso, eso de tener que pensar en ese *"and More"* que abarca la obra de Alvarez. Es significativo, además, el que sólo una dominicana pueda en estos momentos ocupar el espacio reservado a las dominicanas. De hecho,

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en otra colección, publicada en 1989 y subtitulada *The Sexuality of Latinas*, un cuento de Alvarez es el único vehículo de expresion del ser dominicana.

Julia Alvarez es una poeta y prosista nacida en Nueva York de padres dominicanos. Alvarez reside en la República Dominicana gran parte de su niñez. Escritora muy premiada, ha recibido un Kenan Grant por sus cuentos y ha sido Jenny McKean Moore Write Fellow en la George Washington University. Actualmente enseña literatura inglesa y dirige talleres de poesía y prosa en Middlebury College. Su primer poemario *Homecoming* fue publicado por Grove Press en 1984.

Se ha dicho con harta frecuencia que la creación literaria, por lo general, es el producto de las obsesiones de su autor(a). En el caso de Alvarez, a su literatura la mueve el deseo de encontrar una resolución al conflicto que representa el ser mujer, escritora, hispana. En *Homecoming, La vuelta al hogar*, se encuentra la búsqueda solitaria de una mujer que trata de ordenar y de resolver los conflictos que conlleva el no poder conformarse con copiar el modelo dominicano-clase media de lo que significa ser mujer. Resumiendo brevemente, el poemario se encuentra dividido en dos partes. La primera, *"Housekeeping"*, es el retrato de las obsesiones, preocupaciones de una madre, casera, ama de casa nítida, pulcra, ordenada quien, sin embargo, no logra ordenar los sentimientos de una hija que se le escapa, poco a poco, como los impertinentes artículos de vestir que al poner al sol y al viento dan rienda suelta a la imaginación, o como los dedos traviesos de una niña que constantemente reafirma su existencia independiente al escribir su nombre en cada hueco del hogar. En la segunda parte, subtitulada, *"Heroínes"*, el yo poético es el de una de tantas heroínas, de tantas mujeres que prefieren regalarle a la madre un poema, y no el ansiado nieto. No obstante, a pesar de que Alvarez mantiene un yo que trata de alejarse de sí y de los suyos, de sostener la distancia por medio de una sonrisa burlona, tal vez irónica, no se escapa de cierta ambivalencia y, tal vez, de un leve terror, al tener que crear su propio molde y acercarse a la vida como mujer inteligente que sabe lo que le cuesta su independencia. Al terminar de leer *Homecoming* y muchos de los cuentos de Alvarez, se comprende que el eje de todo, el balance que necesita para poder mantener la cordura, yace en la relación con su madre.

En una carta abierta a las escritoras del tercer mundo, la poeta y cuentista chicana Gloria Anzaldúa invita a sus compañeras a escribir, insistiendo en la importancia de la palabra desmitificadora, la palabra que expresa la verdadera historia de la mujer hispana: sus sentimientos, sus relaciones, sus prioridades. Afirma Anzaldúa que "yo escribo para grabar lo que otros borran cuando hablo, para reescribir las historias que otros han malescrito acerca de mí, de ti." (*This Bridge Called My Back* : 184, tr.) Si se piensa en la versión oficial, en la mitificación de la mujer en la cultura hispana, ejemplarizada por el culto a la virginidad y a la maternidad, y se leen las obras de las latinas de nuestros días, se comprende la importancia y el poder de esa palabra que exige Anzaldúa. Todavía aún después de ser adultos dominicanos, y de tantos años de exilio, se escuchan los ecos de aquella canción que nos inculcaron de niños:

> Venid los moradores, del campo y la ciudad/entonemos un himno, de inmenso amor filial/Cantemos de las madres, su ternura y sus afán, y su noble atributo, de abnegación sin par...

Esas líneas representan una de las tantas versiones oficiales de lo que significa ser madre. La "abnegación sin par", es una santidad que, por otro lado, le concede a la madre autoridad e infalibilidad cuando se trata del hogar, y de los pormenores de la educación de los hijos. Los que vivimos en los Estados Unidos, sin embargo, no podemos dejar de notar y de recordar la reciente publicación de numerosos

estudios que pretenden elucidar la compleja relación madre/hija, hecho que de por sí exige, por lo menos, el no volver a caer en simplificaciones fáciles. La otra cara de la moneda, como ya ha explicado Adrienne Rich, es la que carga a la madre, en muchos instantes, con la responsabilidad por la inanición emocional de la hija, por su abandono o por su esclavitud, aunque, en realidad, ambas se encuentren subordinadas y subyugadas por la cultura y la tradición masculinas. (*Of Woman Born:* 218–255)

Julia Alvarez, educada en las universidades norteamericanas, pero también por una dominicana, sabe que no puede culpar a su madre, como lo hicieron tantas compañeras en los inicios del movimiento feminista, por no haberla educado como una amazona. Sabe también que no puede aceptar la autoridad absoluta, el trono de perfección y de pureza al que tan convenientemente se le había relegado a las mujeres que, como su madre, logran solamente el gobierno de un mundo de puertas adentro. El cuento se abre de la manera siguiente:

> La madre todavía las llama 'las cuatro niñas' aunque la menor ya tiene veinte y siete y la mayor cumplirá treinta y tres años el mes entrante. Siempre las ha llamado 'las cuatro niñas' desde que tienen memoria, y la mayor se recuerda hasta del día en que nació la cuarta niña. Antes de entonces, la madre las debe de haber llamado 'las tres niñas', y antes de entonces, 'las dos niñas', pero ni siquiera la mayor, que una vez fue la niña única, se recuerda de que la madre las llamara por otro nombre que no fuera 'las cuatro niñas'.
>
> (*Third Woman, Texas and More.* 21, tr.)

Con esta introducción Alvarez nos planta de lleno en un mundo en el que las mujeres son las eternas niñas que nuncan llegan a crecer ni a tener nombre propio. Es un mundo además, en el que los seres no existen fuera de la familia: se les conoce por su dependencia mutua. Imposible sería pensar, por ejemplo, en una tercera niña sin que existieran la primera y la segunda, etc. La madre tampoco tiene nombre ni vida que no sea la de ejercer el oficio de madre; hecho, por otro lado, que medio se justifica si se entiende el tremendo asunto, susto, ese, el de parir cuatro niñas en un período de seis años. Por eso, implica el cuento, no se le debe culpar a la madre que recurra a ciertas costumbres que la ayuden a simplificar la rutina:

> Las vestía a todas igual en versiones más pequeñas y de colores diferentes a la ropa que ella misma llevaba, así es que el esposo a veces bromeaba y las llamaba 'las cinco niñas.' (21)

El esposo, quien aparece siempre de buen humor, dispuesto a apoyar con sus sabias y breves frases, se apresura a ofrecer, a todo el que esté dispuesto a escucharlo, una explicación de ese fenómeno que representa el sólo tener hijas. "Los toros bravos" dice, "engendran vacas". Y así, se detiene a explicar la narradora, transcurre una infancia que, a pesar de todo, las cuatro niñas disfrutan:

> Las cuatro niñas daban vueltas en el aire, saltaban y se reían mientras daban carreras en amarillo y rosado y azul pálido y blanco, y las personas que pasaban las contaban, '¡una, dos, tres, cuatro niñas!' '¿y los hijos?' 'No,' se disculpaba la madre, 'solamente cuatro niñas.' (21)

En los primeros tres párrafos de una narración bastante extensa, la autora establece el ritmo, la tensión, el tema y el tono que ha de sostener en el cuento. El interés en reconciliar los dos mundos es implícito en la elección de una voz narrativa (más tarde descubriremos que bien puede ser la voz de la segunda niña) que presenta los dos mundos sin emitir juicios y que salta de un código lingüístico (el del mundo infantilizado de la madre) a otro (el de la jerga profesional, por ejemplo, del

mundo de la hija mayor que es sicóloga). La figura del padre, de apoyo tangencial, con su repetición de expresiones en la que sobresalen "un toro bravo engendra vacas" y "una vaca de raza pare vacas" sirve de contrapunto y recalca el buen humor con que se entiende y acepta el hecho de que estos dos mundos corran paralelos. No obstante, cuando se cree llegar a una simplificación, a un entendimiento de ese mundo poco complicado, como parece implicar mi comentario anterior sobre mundos paralelos, el texto retira la información dada. En el caso de la madre, comentan las niñas bonachonamente que no puede entender la sicología ni percatarse de la censura a la que la someten sus "cuatro niñas". Sin embargo, "las niñas" son las sorprendidas cuando la madre con su llanto las obliga, ya adultas, a afirmar que la madre ha sido muy buena. Todo esto lo dicen a pesar de que se quejan, de que resienten la codificación en colores, las confusiones de los maridos y de los novios, las mentiras en la historia oficial que ha tejido la madre para cada una de ellas.

A pesar de que frecuentemente confunde a las niñas o a las novios, la madre atesora para ocasiones especiales una anécdota personal de cada una de ellas. Estas cuatro anécdotas tienen la función en el cuento de crear un subtexto, el díalogo entre dos narradoras: la madre y la segunda niña. Sirven para contrastar las sutilezas de percepción, las diferencias de posturas vitales y de actitud ante la realidad que las circunda. Sirven, además, para recalcar que aún en el mundo de puertas adentro la imaginación exige su puesto, y que el poder creador de la mujer tiene múltiples maneras de manifestarse. La madre/también autora, se nos revela medio-poeta en la historia de la segunda niña. La historia oficial de esta última, a la que siempre vistió de color de rosa, color simbólico de lo femenino, vaticina su futura carrera de poeta, pronosticada, después de un incidente en autobús, cuando la niña apenas tenía tres años. Ese interés de la madre por la carrera de literata de la segunda no disminuye con el pasar del tiempo, y la madre logra encontrarse con o sin invitación (y en muchos casos, a pesar de que la hija le esconda la información) en el medio de la primera fila de todas las lecturas de poesía de su hija. Dispuesta a aplaudir y a apoyar poemas eróticos que atribuye siempre a la imaginación y no a la experiencia de la hija, la madre persiste aunque la historia oficial pocas veces corresponda a la verdad de la hija. La narradora teje una trama sutil en la que ambas, madre e hija, salen y entran de esos mundos que al principio nos parecen paralelos. De hecho, pocas veces se llega a una comprensión mutua perfecta pero sí se logran momentos de gran compenetración y tolerancia mutua. De particular sutileza, ternura y comicidad es el encuentro de la madre con Maynard, el amante de turno, durante una lectura de poemas de la segunda "niña". La madre nunca llega a enterarse de que su vecino, el desconocido a quien brinda otra versión de su historia oficial para la segunda niña, conoce a la "verdadera" poeta. Impulsada por el entusiasmo y por las breves frases de apoyo (tan al estilo de la otra figura masculina en el cuento) que le ofrece Maynard, la madre concluye recitando parte de aquel primer poema que ella misma le había enseñado a su hija:

> La madre bajó la cabeza. 'No estoy segura. De todas maneras,' ella continuó, 'Imagínese, a los tres años ya tenía público. Naturalmente que se hizo poeta'. '¿Quiere Ud. decir Poe, Edgar Allen Poe?' 'Sí, el mismo, el mismo!' la madre gritó... Ella comenzó a recitar: 'Hace muchos años, o algo...o algo en un algo cerca del mar...' La madre levantó la cabeza y se dio cuenta de que el público silencioso la miraba fijamente. El amante se sonrió y le apretó el brazo. En el micrófono, la hija que ya había sido presentada, esperaba a que la señora con canas en la primera fila acabara de hablar. 'Para Maynard,' introdujo su primer poema, '*Sextina de alcoba*'. Maynard

le sonrió a la madre quien también sonreía orgullosa de su hija. (27, tr.)

El poema que apenas recuerda la madre, que ella misma le había enseñado a su hija, representa el lazo que las une. La madre, a pesar de todo, había logrado legarle a la hija el tesoro más preciado: el amor y el interés en la poesía. El poema también representa la vida trunca de la imaginación de la madre pero, además, simboliza su necesidad de crear, esa misma necesidad que ahora siente la hija. Esta necesidad de la madre se manifiesta en el tan criticado orden que le infundió a su vida, en la misma ocurrencia (tan detestada por las "niñas") de crear un código de colores, y finalmente, de reescribir su historia, a su manera, modificada de acuerdo a las necesidades del momento de cada versión de la historia de las niñas cuyas verdades tantas veces la madre no logra aceptar.

El cuento concluye con el nacimiento de la primera nieta. Este acontecimiento considerado de gran importancia logra que la primera y la segunda niña se reconcilien, que la segunda escriba su primer poema en tres años, que la tercera continué la cadena y la vida de las mujeres de la familia, y que la cuarta, salida de un sanatorio después de un colapso emocional, pueda volver a entrar a un hospital. Y, finalmente, que el padre y los maridos apoyen el acontecimiento con el comentario habitual: "Seis niñas...siempre he dicho que las buenas vacas paren vacas..." Comentario que ya aceptan las "niñas" porque es simbólico de la necesidad de pertenecer a una familia y de aceptar las diferencias con sentido del humor y comprensión mutua.

La desmitificación del papel tradicional de la mujer junto a la creación de un mundo real, en el que se puede pertenecer a una familia hispana, y mantener una identidad auténtica es lo que define la contribución de Julia Alvarez al diálogo sobre la mujer dominicana, conversación que por necesidad la comunidad debe continuar. ❐

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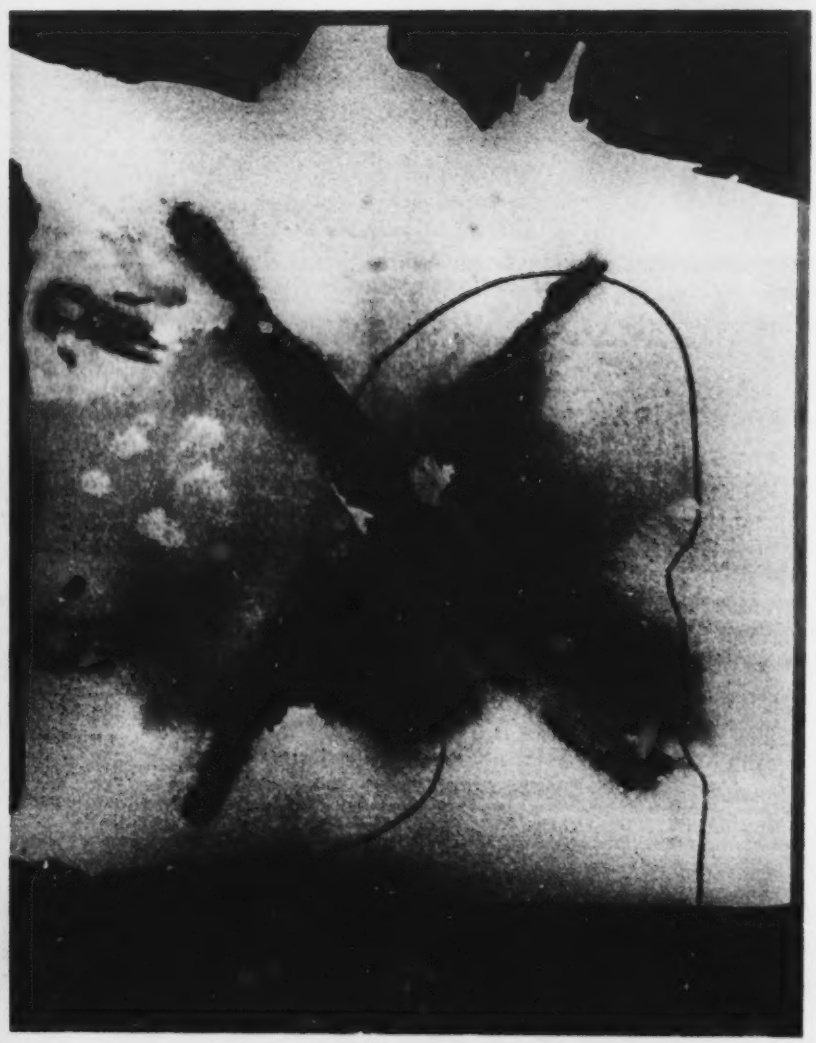
PORTFOLIO

Gloria Rodriguez

"My work is coming to terms with a new visual language. Collage has a language and a reason which is compelling to me. It enables me to translate an area of imagination and intuition into a visual form."

2

3



1 "Boy George Eyes," Collage, 5" x 3", 1986
2 "PTown Girls," Collage, 7.5" x 5.5", 1986
3 " Desaparecido," Acrylic/Paper painting, 1987

La mortaja de polyester

Milagros Pérez Huth

Patria was the oldest child of Doña Concepción Rivera and Manuel Gutierrez. Doña Concepción was a strong domineering lady, self reliant, a woman of common stock in Latin communities. Illiterate but very intelligent about things that counted in life. Her husband Manuel was a good looking postal worker who loved women, in his way also common in Latin communities.

Patria, as I hear it, was not a strong girl physically or mentally. She was like her father only light in skin color. As a young woman she was like a young calf constantly falling. It seems her legs couldn't hold her up. She did poorly in school and was absent minded. Her mother derisively called her "*Potro Mongo*", wobbly colt. She was not a talker but muttered accompanied by unfriendly facial gestures. She is said to have had seizures that were petit mal. People said she was possessed by spirits and had powers of a special kind. She was strange. Of all the daughters she was the least attractive. She never seemed to get into too much trouble with her mother but then she didn't please her too much. She just wasn't the pleasing sort. Of all my aunts I have the least recollection of her.

Patria left my grandmother's house when she was 17 to be the woman of some womanizer who had numerous others. He was many years older than her. He was very mean to her and she didn't stay long with him. My grandmother went to his house and took her away from him. He was using her like a maid. He used to beat her. This union lasted for a short time and I think she never even told her children about this brief and unhappy part of her live. I know about it because my mother told me. Most things I know about Patria are what my mother has told me.

After her return she didn't stay long in my grandmother's house. Without anyone knowing it she was courted and whisked away by a man named Antonio Macale. He was from a family that was not too well regarded. They had a bad reputation in the town. In addition, their hair was kinky, they had broad noses and on and on it went. I guess that's why she kept her courtship a secret. My grandmother used to say people should marry to improve their race. My grandmother was not too pleased when she got wind of what was going on.

Antonio came one night and took *El Potro Mongo* and she went without making a sound. She wanted to leave. I don't know how many years they lived together but I know they had three children. All black skinned like their father. The oldest was Rafael, then Esmeralda, and Antonio the youngest, named after the father. Again Patria was brought home by her

mother. It seemed that Antonio was with another woman, Sara, who was younger and whiter than Patria; a blond in fact. Again she was being mistreated.

My grandmother brought Patria back but said not all of her children could come with her. Rafael was too wild and she was not having him in her house. He couldn't have been more than eight years old. I don't know who brought him up but I know it wasn't his mother. Patria accepted her mother's ultimatum. She couldn't stay with their father, he simply did not want her. Of course Patria did not work.

There were other children in my grandmother's house. My grandmother's house was open as long as people were not too wild and obeyed her rules. Her husband had died years before and now, as she was when he lived, she was the absolute ruler.

I remember Patria as a woman who listened to soap operas on the radio and someone who never related to me. I do remember her as frequently being near her daughter but unable to stop my grandmother from whipping her, along with everyone else who didn't toe the line. She whipped them for many things but one I particularly remember was if you were called and didn't come immediately you would get it, and if caught playing man and woman you would really catch hell. My grandmother didn't like fresh children and playing man and woman was the stuff of the devil.

I, on the other hand, never did any of those type of things and, in addition, I had good hair and little curiosity about bodies, my own included. I was, if not treasured, at least praised for my obediance and clean mind. My grandmother and my aunts constantly praised me, everyone except my aunt Patria.

Esmeralda and I started school together; I spilling over with rage because of my father's death and my mother's recent departure. My mother, like many others, had left for New York City. The people around me were most often times hostile. That's how I recall it. Patria belonged to that constellation of inexplicable beings. I eventually left to live with my mother and lost most contact with my relatives from Puerto Rico. The second hand information took fourth or fifth place to that of our lives in New York City. and we heard from the family only occasionally. My mom is not a frequent writer and we often heard of events out of context.

Patria was then working in the public school lunchroom. It was a job which she held throughout her later life. Five years after I left for New York Esmeralda had to marry, had a baby girl and so on. The news was always, "Esmeralda is back, Esmeralda called in the middle of the night for money." We always heard the news in the form of gossip. Patria in the meantime continued to work in the lunch rooms and was now a nutritionist. She enjoyed her work. I have heard that the lunches had a home cooked touch. I had heard from my mother and other relatives that Patria had been a terrible cook as a young woman. Here she was doing it on a grand scale.

Many years later I went to Puerto Rico for a vacation and I remember Patria offering us her house to stay in. A blue house constructed of wood, an old house, two bedrooms, a living room, dining room and a wonderful large kitchen. It had a front, back and side door, windows and a small shed in the back. The breeze was unforgetable. A garden with plantain trees, lemons, bread fruits and flowers. When we arrived we were dry, sweaty, and tired from the drive to her house. She plucked lemons from the tree and made

the most delicious, cold lemonade and then offered us her bedroom. I would have slept any place, including the shed, but no, she insisted we take her bedroom. This visit was the first in a long time for me. I had not been back for many years. My husband to be and I had had been living together less than a year and when we went to Puerto Rico, we rented a car and went to all the beaches we could find. We didn't spend time with the family, but Patria's husband, she had married again a man much older than herself (her second husband's older brother), was a real gem for us. He was black, a former railroad worker and in his nineties.

He gave us first hand accounts of the sugar plantation industry and the stratification of the workers in this system. Unlike others in the family, he had a much broader view of the world around him.

Patria appeared to be doing just fine in this marriage. Their house was very comfortable, her husband was old and he preferred to talk about the old days. She was middle age. They slept in separate bedrooms. He was meticulous about his diet and daily schedule, read the Bible, and tended the garden. She in turn tended to his needs. His wild oats had long been sown. It appeared to be a good and compatible union. His children were as old or older than Patria. Her children, also, were grown and living on their own, or so it seemed.

We left Puerto Rico feeling rested and the memory of our experiences drifted to the back of our minds. Later Patria's husband died, she continued to work as before, did not seem to miss him and was happy living on her own. Her daughter Esmeralda divorced, remarried, and divorced again. Esmeralda then moved back to Puerto Rico with her mother, later moving back and forth several times between Puerto Rico and the United States.

Patria was now retired and supporting her daughter financially and spiritually. She was again being critized by the family and it went on untill she died. Her daughter was dependent on her mother throughout. But Patria in her later years did exactly what she wanted. If she wanted to give her money to her children, that was her business.

Patria later became a Pentecostal and this seemed to give her strength. In her last year she moved to Chicago to live with her daughter and this is where she died.

Patria loved flowers, particularly daisies. I didn't know this. She died during Easter. In her last days of life preparations were being made for her and she had a big say in how things were to be done. Her shroud, under her orders, was to be white. Her sisters and son in Puerto Rico bought her a simple dress, white polyester. They followed her instructions, they thought, polyester is fantastic. The dress was sent to Chicago for approval. Patria looked at it, made one of her famous facial gestures and said, "Send it back, now, I will not be buried in a polyster shroud."

She was buried in a white linen dress, magnificent in its simplicity, cool and dignified, and suitable to the tropics. ❑

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Ellos/Ellas y Nosotras:
Breve Paseo por las Autopistas y Callejones Sociales

Celina Romany

En un intento de hacer hablar el silencio provocado por años de subordinación social, la mujer ha *tomado* la palabra. Y en dicho acto de posesión ha levantado los velos que esconden su realidad, definida por el *otro*. Ha sido preciso, en-el-levantamiento, derrocar los grandes mitos, las vacas sagradas de la neutralidad, la objetividad, la racionalidad, la igualdad ante la ley. Hemos presenciado la reconstrucción de "la realidad".

Desde diversos prismas o enfoques se captura la subordinación social de la mujer. Utilizando diversos escenarios se identifica dicha subordinación en el hogar, la familia, la crianza de los niños, el empleo, la participación en la vida pública, la educación, las líneas divisorias entre el mundo público y privado, la explotación del cuerpo, la reproducción, la sexualidad. La labor de identificación y descripción de las condiciones bajo las cuales la mujer se inserta en dichos escenarios ha sido de incalculable valor en adelantar el proceso de concientización necesario para estimular unos procesos de cambio social.

De la mano de dicho proceso descriptivo se han ido articulando posiciones teóricas que pretenden explicar la estratificación por género, a su vez, desde la óptica de diferentes disciplinas o narrativas que, equipadas con el conocimiento especializado que les caracteriza, aportan al entendimiento de esta realidad social. Se disparan análisis feministas elaborando diversas posiciones que pretenden esclarecer los niveles de opresión social a los que la mujer está sometida. Pero en dicho esfuerzo nace la *categoría* mujer como paradigma universal de análisis, cayéndose así en el precipicio de generalizaciones forzadas y forjadas en un intento de simplificación abocado al fracaso. En ocasiones, nos olvidamos del marco social y económico en que se materializa la subordinación de la mujer, y nos acomodamos plácidamente en el diván de la "cuestión feminista".

El llamado análisis feminista se concentra en buscar los denominadores comunes que colocan a las mujeres en un lienzo de subordinación. Armados con una metodología que valoriza la experiencia, lo contextual, como fuente de conocimiento (en un esfuerzo por responder al formalismo y el racionalismo que caracteriza la tradición occidental de la ilustración) y la responsabilidad hacia otros (como respuesta al individualismo posesivo que caracteriza al capitalismo liberal) se va forjando una visión feminista en la crítica social, que se funda en la aportación de la experiencia de *la mujer* en descifrar y entender el mundo.

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El camino hacia esa visión ha sido uno tortuoso. Aún para las mujeres que en esta sociedad se mueven en círculos académicos y/o que configuran una élite intelectual (que les brinda una cuasi-independencia de criterio) ha costado mucho romper con el silencio y la invisibilidad que se internaliza. Articular una voz propia cuando se vive en un mundo patriarcal con compañeros que reflejan patrones machistas en la teoría y en la práctica, ha llevado, como diría un instrumentalista de la vida, a explorar posiciones que atiendan prioridades. En ese proceso de "atender prioridades", de atender la agenda de exclusión, se articularon inicialmente los argumentos de igualdad. Somos iguales que ellos. Nada más prioritario cuando se es muda, etérea y desechable. Con un poco de tiempo y práctica algunas (más adelante explico por qué algunas) nos percatamos que *ellos* continúan siendo el paradigma, la norma a emular. Y ser como *ellos* sin sus privilegios sociales nos ha revelado la esclavitud sofisticada.

¿Por qué no cambiar el enfoque? La *movida* pasó a ser una que se asemeja a aquella gran verdad de que si no es día es noche, ergo, si no somos iguales somos *diferentes*. Presenciamos un diluvio de teorías, pseudo-teorías, meta-teorías, canalizadas por las aguas inter-disciplinarias que explican que somos diferentes a ellos y que el meollo/meta-meollo de la "problemática" de la mujer es que esas diferencias han sido devaluadas por la ideología patriarcal dominante. *Ellos*, con su racionalidad, con su discurso objetivo, neutral y científico transitan las grandes avenidas y autopistas; *nosotras*, con un discurso contextual, particular, emocional, pasional, parcializado y subjetivo transitamos los callejones sociales.

Con este esfuerzo apretado de síntesis no quiero omitir las distintas capas de análisis que se mueven entre estos polos. No podemos pasar por alto que estas capas aluden a posiciones tales como que nosotras tenemos unas líneas de comunicación directa con la madre naturaleza, hasta aquellas que, en un esfuerzo de sensatez, aceptando las *diferencias* elaboran una crítica social al sistema político y social en el que se da el proceso de socialización que nos lleva a la subordinación. Quiero hablar de dicho esfuerzo y de su sensatez.

Aún cuando se rechaza por la literatura feminista contemporánea norteamericana la pretensión de universalizar un discurso feminista, la realidad concreta es que el argumento central de análisis toma unos visos esencialistas y metafísicos, que harían muy feliz a Heidegger, pero que hacen muy infelices a aquellas de nosotras que se les dificulta entender la naturaleza humana esencial. El "relevo de responsabilidad metafísica" se coloca en el margen—en una nota al calce—cuando se aclara que no se pretende hablar por la mujer de color, o entrar a analizar las perspectivas de clase. En el margen se aclara que la experiencia y análisis no se universaliza. Sin embargo, (tal vez porque se relegó al espacio reservado para las notas al calce?) se sufre de un grave ataque de amnesia y se prosigue el análisis (en el mismo centro de ensayo) tomando como punto de referencia "la" experiencia de género.

En otras ocasiones, en el esfuerzo de mantener la pureza del análisis de género mientras se reconocen otras formas de opresión social, ("variaciones sobre un mismo tema"), se invocan los poderes mágicos que posee la conjunción *y*. Haga un examen de la literatura sobre género *y* clase, género *y* raza, género *y* etnicidad. La experiencia de género/metafísica desciende, por obra y gracia de la conjunción *y*, al reino prosaico y particular de los mortales que pertenecen a una clase, raza, o grupo étnico. Sin embargo, solo baja de visita a ofrecer alguna compañía. La experiencia de clase, raza étnica, ó cultural, y la ubicación social particular que le corresponde de conformidad a la ideología dominante, son suplementos a la metafísica del género. El *género* continua siendo el centro.

La experiencia de género—que se articula como una voz diferente—(en

particular a partir del trabajo de Nancy Chodorow[1], Carol Gilligan[2] y sus seguidoras en Estados Unidos) mayormente descansa en la articulación de un drama familiar que se configura por la ideología dominante patriarcal. Los datos que se utilizan para explicar como la niña va articulando una forma de aprehender el mundo *diferente*, conforman un universo muy limitado, principalmente el mundo de la mujer blanca, perteneciente a la clase media norteamericana. Un mundo en el que la desigualdad de poder se manifiesta más abiertamente en el campo de la sexualidad, división de trabajo en el hogar, y en el que no hay que lidiar con esos y otros problemas que emanan de las realidades del racismo y la pobreza en nuestra sociedad.

Lo que es aún más problemático es como el discurso de las *diferencias*, de golpe y porrazo, le atribuye a la mujer el monopolio de una experiencia que pretende derrumbar dos baluartes del capitalismo liberal, por un lado, su formalismo y acontextualidad y, por otro lado, el individualismo posesivo, base de un discurso del individuo como artículo de consumo fungible y base de una visión de separación y enajenación en las interacciones personales. En vez de enfocar el papel quye juegan las estructuras sociales de el capitalismo liberal en la configuración de dichos discursos, se persigue amortiguar su impacto devastador reclutando la *experiencia femenina* como fuente de inspiración para unas alternativas. Dichas estructuras, sin embargo, se mantienen en su lugar.[3]

En fin que lo que me preocupa, y que esta muy a tono con la publicación de este número dedicado a la mujer, es la necesidad de articular nuestras propias teorías, con la ayuda de una metodología que descansa en nuestra experiencia y que rescata nuestras voces en esa experiencia. El objetivo es derrotar el cariz metafísico de la investigación y análisis feminista que permea el feminismo dominante norteamericano, y a su vez aportar a un mejor discernimiento de la dinámica que se da entre los grupos marginados y las estructuras sociales que colaboran en perpetuar su marginación.[4]

No resulta fácil articular dichas teorías puesto que caminamos terreno movedizo al intentar trazar unas líneas demarcatorias entre los puntos comunes y las diferencias que tenemos con mujeres cuya experiencia cultural, racial y económica es distinta. No queremos negar los puntos comunes, pero tampoco queremos afirmar (así nos lo dicta nuestra experiencia) que esos puntos comunes provienen de una experiencia metafísica de género. Podemos narrar historias similares de silencios, victimización, abuso sexual, violación dentro y fuera del matrimonio, discrimen en el empleo, esterilización. Pero caminamos juntas hasta cierto punto. Nuestra experiencia de género *intersecta* con la marginalidad social que proviene de la opresión social de clase, racial y étnica y en el caso de la mujer puertorriqueña de la opresión colonial. La intersección se da en un contexto de formación de una identidad de un sujeto capaz de entender la relación dialéctica que se da entre las estructuras sociales (y su discurso dominante) y el llamado consentimiento y/o complicidad que éstas irradian. Esa intersección en la formación de la identidad de la mujer puertorriqueña (o de una mujer de color en la nación norteamericana)[5] se va reflejando en todos los escenarios comenzando por la sexualidad. Los patrones de dominación sexual, violencia doméstica, división de trabajo en el hogar, crianza de niños, no pueden abstraerse de la realidad marginal que informa ser un sujeto colonizado, oprimido racial y económicamente. Vemos pues como la conjunción *y* en el análisis de esta problemática posee los poderes mágicos de un mago en circo de tercera categoría de *tournee* por la Patagonia.

En la literatura feminista que analiza la realidad puertorriqueña encontramos un caudal de información de gran utilidad para revelar las limitaciones del análisis feminista norteamericano predominante. En la narrativa escrita por mujeres puertorri-

queñas encontramos ejemplos significativos. Nicholasa Mohr viene a la memoria. Cuando describe los múltiples escenarios de la vida puertorriqueña en los Estados Unidos, (particularmente en Nueva York) nos permite recordar la visión etnocéntrica y clasista que ofrece un análisis como el presentado por feministas norteamericanas como Carol Gilligan y Nancy Chodorow, y que descansa esencialmente en narrativas psicológicas. En el diálogo de dos amigas de la infancia que se encuentran luego de unos años sin verse, Lillian, estudiante de psicología le *explica* a Yolanda, exconvicta, el complejo de Edipo freudiano, base del análisis que utiliza el psicoterapista de esta última en un esfuerzo por rehabilitarla.

> "...But what's a story about the olden Greek days got to do with me and the street out there? Look, Maybe I started on drugs because of a lotta things that might be wrong with me. Right? First of all, drugs are out there, available for anybody who wants to get high. And being high is a ba[illegible] just think I'm sick to say that. [illegible]s true, I swear It! And at the beginning everybody out there is real willing to get you high. Junkies want company, believe me, I'm saying it right. When you're high, it's beautiful, because you got no worries, man. You feel fabulous, you ain't scared of nothing and nobody. Your problems are over because you don't see where you live and you don't see what you ain't got and what you look like, and you don't miss what you can't see. Everything's perfect. But then you need more and more shit to keep you going. You don't get high so easy no more. You got to hang on to that feeling and you chase it like mad... you're not about to lose it. And the chase is a nightmare. Where you gonna get the money? Because by this time your body can't live without drugs.... and you need shit just to feel normal, never mind being high. Just feeling normal and not dying becomes your problem. And, you know, like my mother ain't got a cent, right? I can't even steal from her if I wanted to. I'm not smart like you, right? School turns me off. So what's left? Stealing and hustling. All your friends are junkies. You know you never gonna earn enough at no factory or being a salesclerk to support your habit. Because by now, it's taking several hundred dollars a day. A day! That's right! So you steal and you turn a few tricks and then you get yourself a man for protection. A pimp, so you got more rights on the street. Then you got more troubles that you need, right? Because now you got more than one habit to support, right? And there you are, part of that whole life scene, and it's got nothing to do with wanting to sleep with my father, who I never even seen, or some olden Greek times!"[6]

El análisis del impacto de nuestra realidad colonial en la mujer puertorriqueña que radica en la isla así como la que radica en los Estados Unidos[7] debe profundizarse aún más puesto que arroja claridad en el examen de los elementos de consentimiento/complicidad que apuntaran Antonio Gramsci y Simone de Beauvoir así como de los elementos de coerción que mantienen en su lugar las estructuras patriarcales y el discurso paralelo a ellas.[8] Hoy podemos afirmar que existe suficiente literatura interdisciplinaria que describe la ubicación, la familia, el empleo, hasta su participación más directa en las instituciones políticas. Es menester seguir describiéndola pero también es preciso articular marcos teóricos que la intenten explicar y que permitan extrapolar esta discusión teórica a la discusión de las teorías sobre la opresión y marginalidad.[9]

La identificación de una conciencia colonizadas y de cómo ésta recarga la opresión patriarcal resalta la necesidad de explorar el efecto simultáneo de diversas formas de opresión. Se despeja

el horizonte y se identifican mejor los agresores. También se identifican mejor las voces de resistencia y se derivan lecciones importantes de ellas. Debemos evitar caer en un análisis que solo descubra la voz de la víctima. Nuestra experiencia de resistencia también debe incorporarse. Después de todo, nosotras como mujeres puertorriqueñas, hemos desarrollado un conocimiento especializado al tener que lidiar con el poder y la autoridad de una metrópolis masculina, un estado colonial desposeído, también masculino, y con unos muy masculinos compañeros colonizados. En fin, que no descubro el Mediterráneo al afirmar que un proceso de descolonización y liberación nacional que no atienda a las múltiples formas sociales de opresión, incluyendo el sexismo y el racismo, nos coloca en la posición de arar en el mar.

Solo intentamos incorporar nuestra posición en el análisis teórico dominante. Intentamos también aclarar que los permisos de tránsito para las autopistas y callejones sociales no se dan únicamente sobre las bases de género, ni necesariamente sobre las bases del género "acompañado" de los elementos raciales y de clase. El análisis debe ser más integral.[10] ❑

ENDNOTES

1 Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

2 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1982).

3 En el ámbito legal esta problemática ha servido para que patronos argumenten y ganen casos de discrimen en el empleo, utilizando el argumento de que la mujer selecciona voluntariamente no estar en puestos que reclamen un alto grado de competitividad y, por supuesto, un salario más alto. En *EEOC v Sears* (839 F2d 302, 1988) el patrono argumentó exitosamente que las mujeres, por ser diferentes, no interesaban posiciones en puestos de venta que devengaban comisiones más altas pero que requerían una agresividad y competencia mayor. Lo interesante del caso es que el patrono usó el testimonio de una historiadora feminista que basaba su análisis en la teoría de las diferencias. Un buen ejemplo de como la teoría de las diferencias, aislada del contexto crítico social, puede servir de justificación para la marginalización económica de la mujer.

4 Para una crítica de dicho ejercicio metafísico en el contexto de la teoría de derecho feminista (feminist jurisprudence) véase Celina Romany, "The Intersection of Race and Gender in the Critique of the Liberal Self: The 'Unofficial' Story", a publicarse en edición especial sobre teoría de derecho feminista, *University of Tulsa Law Journal*, enero 1990.

5 Algunos ejemplos de la literatura de la mujer de color que aborda esta problemática lo son Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Bell Hooks, *Talking Back (Thinking Feminist/Thinking Black)* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, editoras, *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983); Barbara Smith, ed. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983).

6 Nicholasa Mohr, "I Never Even Seen My Father", *In Nueva York* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1988).

7 Debemos, sin embargo, ser conscientes de que la realidad colonial se vive y se percibe de forma diferente en los Estados Unidos y la isla. La tendencia fuerte a simplificar y a categorizar experiencias como se categorizan insectos nos lleva a menudo a un análisis superficial de lo complejo. Julio Marzán, en el contexto del lenguaje, ofrece una perspectiva que intenta escapar de la simplificación, pese a tratar temas sensitivos y emocionalmente cargados. Observa:

"Ungilded, this is our collective reality: minoritized Puerto Rican and colonized puertorriqueño are two wings of the same funny-looking, half-naked bird. The colonized wing is covered over with pretty, fake feathers. The minoritized wing is raw with skin bumps. We may all share a dream of a wholly and truly plumed, uncolonized or unminoritized bird but invariably awake to realize that for the present our bird, formed by history to be that bird, must fly as is. Unfortunately, the island's intellectuals find it more elegant to speak of their

colonization to the exclusion of the Puerto Rican population as a whole, as if colonization were wildly different from minoritization. It is a misconception they cling to even though they constantly jet from the colony to the community and back. And while in the community, their being more genteel ingratiates them with the mainstream. Many discover that they and the mainstream harbor the same classist stereotype of the Neorrican. The imported islanders soon become the minority of choice and soon occupy available minority roles. Afterwards, weighed down by the contradiction of denying their minority status and having voluntarily assumed the responsibilities of one, they vent their frustration on this immigrant chapter of Puerto Rican history by disdaining it". Julio Marzán, "Puertorriqueño in English: A Contradiction in Terms?", ensayo en progreso.

8 Para un análisis de la intersección del patriarcado y el colonialismo véase Celina Romany, "Patriarchy and Colonialism in Puerto Rico: An Essay on Gender and National Decolonization", Manuscrito inédito.

9 Pase repaso a algunos ensayos o textos imbuidos con las corrientes post-modernistas y post-estructuralistas. Percátese del inmenso placer que se deriva en un juego lingüístico, auto-referente que reclama el concepto de marginalidad como aguijón para atacar al "centro" y todo lo que se asemeje al "centro". El "sujeto", el concepto de la "identidad" se caracteriza como anacrónico. Nuestra "experiencia" marginal debe llevar la ofensiva en la crítica al surgimiento y popularidad de estas teorías. En particular, la intersección de la experiencia de subordinación por género con otras formas de opresión merece especial atención. George Yúdice trae al contexto de la experiencia concreta de marginalidad su crítica a dichas corrientes teóricas. Señala:

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"It would be equally problematic, however to claim the postmodernity" of the oppressed and subaltern, for that maneuver might serve to theorize the futility of a politics of empowerment. The attacks by certain poststructuralist intellectuals on a feminist empowerment respond to this double bind of the "marginal," who, despite being the vehicle of the valorized "marginalization" of the "decentered" enlightened elites, is chastised for seeking the material conditions (equal rights, equal pay, institutional recognition, etc.) that the elites already enjoy. The very attack on the notion of identity is problematic in this respect, for identity is a mayor weapon in the struggles of the oppressed." "Marginality and the Ethics of Survival"; en Andrew Ross, editor, *Universal Abandon?, The Politics of Postmodernism* (Minnessota: Univ. of Minnessota Press, 1988).

10 Como advertencia adicional aclaro algo que para todo aquel que se ubica en el margen es harto conocido. No se reclama un conocimiento privilegiado de la *verdad* puesto que conocemos su esencia camaleónica.

Cuban Socialism:
Some Thoughts after Thirty Years of Revolution

Marifeli Pérez-Stable

The Cuban Revolution has reached a watershed. Three decades have passed since its extraordinary victory on January 1, 1959. In principle, the 1976 introduction of a management and planning system—the *cálculo económico*—promoted relative decentralization, greater enterprise autonomy, and more widespread material incentives.

Since 1986, a process of rectification (*rectificación*) has criticized this management and planning system. The critique argues that the system breaches the Revolution's morale and relies more on procedures than people. Cuban leaders, particularly Fidel Castro, have staked the rectification on an appeal to the past. Their own struggle against Batista and the 100 year fight for Cuban independence inspire their call. The revolution's future hinges on restoring the moral purpose which made survival possible against all odds. Cuba's continued ability to defy the United States depends on its intransigence and unity. *Patria o muerte* is the revolution's renewed discourse. Present economic difficulties require solutions that do not weaken socialism in Cuba. The rectification, moreover, acquires special significance because it runs counter to the program for *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the Soviet Union. As in the 1960s, Fidel Castro is invoking nationalism to uphold the distinctiveness of Cuban socialism and implement policies consonant with the Island's history and culture.

This essay raises questions about present directions in view of three decades of revolutionary transformations in Cuba. Contemporary Cuba differs markedly from prerevolutionary society. More importantly, Cuba on the eve of the 1990s is significantly different than in the 1960s. Cubans are today more urban, better educated, and healthier. While differences between urban and rural areas remain, these are less pronounced. Still largely dependent on sugar production for export, the economy has, nonetheless, undergone substantial changes. Diversification for domestic consumption is modest, but real. The sugar industry is no longer the scourge of rural Cuba nor is it determinant of

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financing earlier favored by Guevara, the radical experiment's improvised planning was not based on systematic controls and records. While capital accumulation represented more than 30 percent of Gross Material Product, investments were inefficient and wasteful. Material incentives diminished and so did labor productivity. A scarcity of goods and services rendered monetary income almost meaningless. Worker absenteeism soared. In 1970, 20 percent of the labor force registered absent from work— in regions of Oriente province the figure reached a staggering 50 percent. *Conciencia* did not progressively inspire people to work for the collective well-being. As capitalist incentives and structures were curtailed and socialist substitutes failed to emerge, militarization filled the void. Mass mobilizations, however voluntary for thousands of Cubans, proceeded under a regimen of military discipline.

The radical experiment, moreover, failed to develop its own institutions. The Communist Party had about 50,000 members. The trade unions essentially disappeared. A vanguard workers' movement, representing only 10 percent of the working class, took their place. There was no organization to address rank-and file workers—their interests and their duties. The other mass organizations were similarly more engaged in mobilizations for defense and production than in channeling participation, or involvement, on issues of immediate, individual relevance. The struggle for the millennium strained—not enhanced—popular consciousness. Revolutionary élan waned. Indeed, the Cuban people assumed—in the words of now Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodríguez—a *resignación de apoyo*. In the aftermath of the 1970 debacle, Fidel underscored the imperative of developing "conditions to allow the masses, through their organizations, an increasing participation in the decision-making processes that affect their most vital problems." In calling for a process of democratization, the revolutionary leadership implicitly recognized that the radical experiment sidetracked democracy. The revolution could clearly not thrive on mere resignation.

The appeal to *conciencia* and the exaltation of historic undertakings brought about some rather undemocratic consequences. Under exceptional circumstances, ordinary people are capable of extraordinary actions. The early years of the Cuban revolution exemplified such circumstances and actions. The leadership banked on continuing them with the radical experiment, but failed. In part, the watershed of 1970 indicated that the average Cuban could not be called upon to be a hero/heroine on a daily basis. Concern with the prosaic—with the here and now—is not automatically more democratic. But, it certainly identifies feasible goals in a language that communicates to a majority of people. For instance, when a few months before his death, Lázaro Peña—the old communist chief of the Central Organization of Cuban Trade Unions (CTC)—insisted to the 1973 labor congress that *el sindicato es de todos*, the message was potentially a much more democratic one. The 1960s emphasis on vanguard workers at the exclusion—even if unintended—of most of the working class was in practice anti-democratic.

Rectification, Cuban Nationalism, and Contemporary Socialism

The rectification is not the 1960s revisited. However weak and constrained, there is an institutional order in Cuba today. The economy is guided by a plan, albeit often irregularly and inefficiently. Material incentives are curtailed, but not eliminated. It is also not merely the *cálculo económico* revised. By the mid-1980s, the shortcomings of the economic management

employment opportunities. Widespread unemployment is a memory. Relative equality characterizes living standards which are austere, but adequate to satisfy basic needs. Economic performance, however, continues below the prospects initially raised by the revolution and the expectations which its policies of inclusive development promoted. Unlike other Latin American countries, Cuba faces consumption pressures from all population strata. All Cubans command unmet purchasing power.

How well do current directions respond to the new realities? While signaling indisputable problems associated with the *cálculo económico,* the process of rectification may well be more in tune with the past than with the present. More specifically, rectification conjures old visions to address new problems in a Cuba where the past—even the revolutionary past—is less central for present and future than it once was. The revolution's impressive achievements may well have diminished the efficacy of its nationalist and radical discourse.

The 1960s Revisited

During the late 1960s, Cuba sought—and failed—to generate a capital accumulation momentum to attain more independent socialist development. Earlier in the decade, a poorly implemented drive to industrialize led to the neglect of agriculture, especially sugar cane, and a balance of payments crisis as sugar harvests and exports declined and capital and intermediate goods imports increased. The failure to industrialize rapidly reinforced the centrality of sugar as the only economic sector capable of generating the resources for development. The aim of the sugar-centered strategy was to modernize the industry, establish linkages with other economic sectors, and earn sufficient hard currency to diversify and thus, grow with more autonomy from the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. Mass mobilizations and voluntary work were essential to the new strategy's implementation.

By the mid-1960s, rural Cuba was experiencing labor shortages. How could workers be mobilized to work in agriculture? Material incentives were a possible answer. The revolution, however, was intransigent in its commitment to equality. Amidst mounting austerity, use of material incentives was unthinkable. Moreover, material rewards would absorb resources which the new development strategy targeted for accumulation. The revolutionary government did have a bank of popular support which could be turned into an economic input. Guevara partially based his advocacy of moral incentives on the manifestation of this support at critical moments such as the Playa Girón invasion and the Missile Crisis. He was convinced that a principal challenge for the revolution was to translate the "spirit" of Girón and October into resources for daily life and work. The radical experiment—its failure notwithstanding—did have an inner economic logic. It was not capricious.

The radical experiment likewise entailed a political logic. During the early 1960s, the revolution confronted problems of leadership organization and popular participation. The formation of the Cuban Communist Party in 1965 established the context for the exercise of power. Mass organizations, especially the trade unions, and the militias were the medium for popular participation, or at least involvement. However, increasing bureaucratization accompanied the socialist organization of the economy and threatened the leadership's "contact with the masses"—the very basis of the revolution. In 1965, Guevara conceded that a structured relationship between the Cuban people and the revolutionary leadership was missing. Then extant socialist experiences, however, indicated the revolution should proceed cautiously and creatively towards institutionalization. The exercise of power divorced from ordinary citizens and the preeminence of bureaucratic politics were

pitfalls Cuba sought to avoid. Unlike other socialist countries, Cuba could count on the masses: popular militias were the revolution's mainstay. The revolution would forge its own institutions to channel mass support. Also in 1965, Fidel Castro proclaimed:

> "We shall seek our own revolutionary institutions, our own new institutions, stemming from our conditions, from our idiosyncrasy, from our customs, from our character, from our spirit, from our thought, from our creative imagination. We shall not imitate."

The themes of the radical experiment are today once again prominent. The rectification too involves economic and political logics. It is likewise not capricious. Serious economic problems continue to besiege Cuba. The Island's economy remains open and vulnerable. Low sugar and oil prices—the latter affect income from Soviet petroleum re-exports—cut back hard currency earnings by more than 50 percent. The *cálculo económico* confronted difficulties of implementation, supply, and organization. Central ministries were slow to cede their authority to lower levels. The U.S. embargo, hard currency scarcity, and the peculiarities of socialist trade often prevented the regular supply of raw materials necessary for successful enterprise autonomy. Unrevised output norms resulted in inflated salaries and decreased productivity. A modest recourse to market mechanisms encouraged private initiatives in agriculture, housing, and the provision of some consumer services and durables. These initiatives appeared to stimulate rampant individualism and inequalities.

The crossroads of the mid-1980s pointed in two directions. The first was streamlining the economic management and planning system to improve its efficacy through more widespread use of markets and material incentives. The second was to partially retrench from economic reforms and resort to consciousness raising as a means to overcome economic difficulties. The first was rejected for its reliance on mechanisms, inequalities, and individual greed as levers for development. Its technocratic and bureaucratic orientation did not adequately value the revolution's greatest wealth and undermined its most important bulwark against the United States—the dignity and energies of the Cuban people. The second is the rectification which, while warning against repeating the idealistic mistakes of the past, affirms them to have been less dangerous for the revolution than the errors of the post-1976 system. "A communist spirit and *conciencia*, a revolutionary will and vocation were, are, and always will be a thousand times more powerful than money!" Castro declared, as the visions of the 1960s once again defined the revolution's direction.

The process of rectification is categorical in its critique of the *cálculo económico*. The assessment of the 1960s idealism is more indeterminate. The 1975 Communist Party congress noted that Cuba had been insufficiently appreciative of the experience of other socialist countries. By default, the adoption of the economic management and planning system, the expansion of the Communist Party, the restructuring of the mass organizations, the establishment of Popular Power, in short, the full spectrum of institutionalization emerged as the radical experiment's counterpart. Today the errors of the 1970s and early 1980s are attributed to the uncritical imitation of other socialist countries' experience without due attention to Cuban history and conditions. Other than cautioning against incurring on idealism, however, the rectification extols the 1960s for their principles. The radical experiment's record, however, requires reexamination.

Exalted ideals and radical intransigence notwithstanding, the late 1960s bequeathed the revolution with a rather ambiguous heritage. The Cuban economy performed disastrously. Unlike the system of budgetary

and planning system were evident. Their origin was another matter. Were these failings due to the *cálculo* itself or to its poor and partial implementation? The rectification unequivocally attributes them to the the post-1976 system. Blame, however, may not be so easily ascribed. For example, the *cálculo* is faulted for mismanaged investments. Yet, in early 1986, the weekly magazine Bohemia reported the conclusion of 400 major industrial projects during 1981–1985. The year 1985 saw a 10 percent increase in the number of enterprises operating profitably over those in 1984. In February 1987, the Communist Party acknowledged slight improvements in overall economic efficiency between 1981–1984. A comparison of the 1976–1985 record with those of the 1960s, the early 1970s, and 1986–1988 might not prove to be so unequivocal. Incremental reforms rather than blanket condemnation might have been more indicative to remedy the noted shortcomings.

A movement to reform the *cálculo económico,* however, would have been too narrow to encompass current directions. The rectification purports to rekindle old visions and move the Cuban people beyond their daily concerns. It extols human will and determination as the fount of past achievements and the source of future successes. It derives sustenance from the radical nationalism which inspired Cuban revolutionaries from José Martí to Fidel Castro. Current directions underscore the revolution's national quest. Unity of purpose is the only bulwark against the United States. The 1976–1985 system appealed to individual interests and abetted inequalities which threatened to undermine principles and values. No reform was possible. The revolution's principal accomplishment, noted a 1986 editorial in the party newspaper *Granma*, lies in having bestowed upon the Cuban people "for the first time in their history...their full dignity, *conciencia* of their power and of their immense and inexhaustible energy." The *cálculo económico* emphasized mechanisms over consciousness and endangered the very heart of the revolution. Castro thus asked: "If we lose our *conciencia*, if we lose our spirit, What do we have left? What does a small country have left to confront the empire?"

A central component of the rectification is therefore its populist appeal. Workers are called upon to be inspectors at their work centers. Those in the lowest paid strata—about 10 percent of the labor force—received wage increases of 10–17 percent. Past sanctions are to be deleted from the dossiers of workers who subsequently improve their discipline. In December 1986, austerity measures reduced privileges for functionaries and cadres. Bureaucrats and technocrats are lambasted as "absolutely reactionary." Many of them dismissed construction microbrigades, for example, as inefficient and unproductive. Since 1986, however, the microbrigades have constructed numerous daycare centers, apartment buildings, and clinics. Bureaucrats and technocrats were quick to reduce social spending because their own privileges desensitized them to popular needs. While generally not corrupt, managers tend to be "indifferent, negligent, irresponsible" and somewhat resistant to the rectification.

Nonetheless, the rectification does not directly address the dilemma of democracy. It calls for strengthening the Communist Party and reinforcing its "contact with the masses." It proclaims confidence in the people. It depends on cadres to convey popular sentiments to the leadership. The process of rectification does point to potential democratization. Improving worker participation in economic planning and enterprise management is a stated goal, for instance. Managers are called upon to be political as well as administrative leaders. Union leaders are expected to be more exacting of management. These objectives were also expressed in the past without widespread success, however. Although improving over time, enterprise

assemblies and other avenues for worker participation have generally been formal—more ritual than substantive. Whether more meaningful participation is possible without significant decentralization is a central question. Democratization at the work place may well require greater enterprise autonomy and effective material incentives. It may also entail greater worker supervision over labor discipline and enterprise management. Workers' systematic input into the appointment and recall of managers may indeed be a prerequisite for more meaningful participation. Current policies, however, emphasize recentralization and underscore economic difficulties. Neither is readily conducive to democratization.

The process of rectification relies primarily on moral principles to safeguard the proper exercise of power. Indeed, present directions are the initiative of Fidel Castro, not the Communist Party. The February 1986 party congress was certainly critical of the economic management and planning system, but it would be difficult to extract the full extent of the rectification from its documents. Charismatic leadership—not institutional politics—was the catalyst for current policies which may or may not be salutary for Cuba under present economic conditions and continued U.S. hostility. That the 1986 turn came about through Fidel Castro's initiative, however, is somewhat worrisome, for it does not provide a precedent for governing Cuba after he is gone. Moreover, its discourse of moral exhortations, revolutionary sacrifice, and intransigent nationalism is possible only because of Fidel Castro. It is unlikely that Raúl Castro or any other future leader of Cuba will be able to resort to the same discourse. The revolution after Fidel will perforce depend more strictly on institutional processes for the exercise of power. In addition, in the event of normalization of relations with the United States, the formal expression of Cuban nationalism which *Patria o muerte* embodies will likewise undergo revisions. The rectification thus reinforces the past to address present difficulties. It does not offer a feasible discourse for new generations of Cubans whose charge will be to reaffirm socialism without recourse to Fidel Castro.

In 1965, then Minister of Foreign Trade Alberto Mora noted in one of his contributions to the Great Debate:

> The only real way to assure the evolution of...socialist—and progressively communist—consciousness is to establish relationships of production within the new society's political organization (relationship of the individual to the State, the role of the Party, etc.) and ideological perception (of art, etc.)...Since the interrelationships in these areas are so strict, we are probably unable to assure the evolution of consciousness...by simply eliminating the desire for personal gain as a motive for social behavior...Rather, we must at the same time assure that the superstructure is so organized as to prevent the substitution of the money motive by the power motive.

The elimination of personal gain as a motive of social behavior is, of course, not simple. Mora, however, did underscore a crucial conundrum for socialism: the exercise of power is not absolutely and exclusively determined by class. The demise of capitalism and private ownership of the means of production does not automatically result in new forms of democracy.

The relative autonomy of politics constitutes a central direction to Mikhail Gorbachev's program of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. The reform movement clearly responds to the Soviet Union's history and conditions which are significantly different from those of Cuba. Yet, there are dangers in overemphasizing these differences. The current Soviet leadership has revived a vision of socialism which existed before Joseph Stalin consolidated his power. During the 1920s, the

Bolsheviks held their own Great Debate over the organization of socialism. Eventually a centralized, monolithic vision prevailed. Its more pluralist, decentralized counterpart resurfaced briefly under Nikita Khruschev and more vigorously and coherently since 1985. From the onset, then, even though one was sidetracked, there were two blueprints for socialism. Moreover, the revolution did, in general, adopt models of central planning and political organization which emerged in the Soviet Union after the late 1920s. Cuba's adoption of these models—in their various manifestations throughout three decades—did not replicate the Soviet experience. Their structures, however, did address the revolution's conditions. Underdevelopment, besiegement, and charismatic leadership are certainly conducive to the centralization of power.

However specific to the Soviet Union, *perestroika* and *glasnost* also highlight dilemmas of contemporary socialism. Its success or failure notwithstanding, the Soviet reform program validates the alternative vision of socialism buried for so long. It is, moreover, significant that this validation comes from those at the helm of the Soviet state. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union has broadened the discourse on the organization of socialism. Doing so from a position of power is bringing about widespread and far-reaching consequences. When the critique of contemporary socialism was formulated mainly by Western intellectuals and Soviet and Eastern European dissidents, these consequences were unthinkable. That democracy too is a moral incentive is, perhaps, the most radical implication of Mikhail Gorbachev's program. Without reneging the revolution's legacy, younger generations of Cubans may well look for alternative visions to reaffirm Cuban socialism under changing national and international conditions.

Conclusion

The rectification underscores the revolution's present watershed. Its rationale is consistent with the visions which inspired the *fidelistas* in their struggle against Batista and their efforts during the late 1960s to establish a unique identity for Cuban socialism. It, moreover, conjures a powerful continuity with Cuba's tradition of independence and radicalism. The logic of rectification with respect to Cuban history and the early revolutionary years is compelling indeed. Whether current policies take sufficient account of the transformations in Cuban society which the revolution's success brought about is another matter.

The discourse of rectification is impassioned but monolithic. It is unlikely to encompass the diversity and complexity that is surely present in Cuba's more urban, better educated, healthier citizenry. Patria o muerte resonates with dignity and defiance. It was first sounded when the French ship La Coubre exploded in Havana harbor in March 1960. The threats to the Cuban nation are today more subtle, however. Defense of national sovereignty may well require a new discourse. The overwhelming majority of Cuba's citizens cannot be as moved by a past they did not live, or do not remember, as the generation who struggled against dictatorship in the 1950s and consolidated the revolution in the early 1960s. The turn towards rectification in 1986 is understandable in view of that past. It is less persuasive a direction to address present complexities and future exigencies. ❑

PORTFOLIO

Elizabeth Grajales

"My work is instinctive and internal and is always in a constant state of evolution. Living in this city of grey buildings and congestion sends my imagination swirling in my drawings because they are an early warning system, like the canary in a coal mine. They are reminding us of a 'system gone wrong.'"

1 "Burning for Burger King," Chalk pastel on paper, 1989
2 "Hamburger Forest," Chalk pastel on paper, 1988
3 "Today Could Last Another Million Years, " 1988
4 "Armageddon," Chalk pastel on paper, 1989

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CENTRO LIBRARY

Evelina López Antonetty Puerto Rican Research Collection

The following is a partial list of theses and books on Puerto Rican women published in the 1980s.

Lista parcial de libros y tésis sobre la mujer puertorriqueña publicados en la década de 1980 y que pueden ser consultados en la Biblioteca del Centro.

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Olivieri, Frances. A Phenomenological Study of the Puerto Rican Woman Who Develops Breast Cancer. Ph.D., Boston University, 1985.

Pacheco, Aimée. ***A Study of Sex-role Attitudes, Job Involvement and Job Satisfaction of Women Faculty at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras.*** Ph.D., New York University, 1981.

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Rivera Ramos, Alba Nydia. *La mujer puertorriqueña: investigaciones psico-sociales.* Río Piedras, P.R.: Centro para el Estudio y Desarrollo de la Personalidad Puertorriqueña, 1985.

Sánchez-Ayendez, Melba M. *Puerto Rican Elderly Women: Aging in an Ethnic Minority Group in the United States.* University of Mass. at Amherst, 1984.

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Towns-Miranda, Luz. Acculturation, Sex Role Traditionalism, and Symptomatology among Puerto Rican Women in New York and Puerto Rico. Ph.D., New York University, 1985.

Zavala-Martínez, Iris. "En la lucha: The Economic and Socioemotional Struggles of Puerto Rican Women," in *Politics of Race and Gender.* New York: Haworth Press, c.1988.

There are also a number of journals containing articles on Puerto Rican women; among these are *Hómines, Pensamiento Crítico* and *International Migration Review.*

Existen una serie de revistas que contienen artículos relacionados con la mujer puertorriqueña. Aquí podemos mencionar a Hómines, Pensamiento Crítico *e* International Migration Review.

Pura Belpré Collection

The papers, documents and other artifacts belonging to Pura Belpré (c.1902-1982) were recently donated to the Centro Library as part of its Puerto Rican Archives Project. Belpré, our first librarian in the New York Public Library system, was a well-known writer of short stories for children and was very active in the Puerto Rican community. The Collection will be made available to the public in the near future.

Colección Pura Belpré

Como parte del Proyecto de Archivos Puertorriqueños, recientemente fueron transferidos a la Biblioteca del Centro los documentos, libros, marionetas, muñecos, y otras pertenencias de Pura Belpré (c.1902– 1982). Nuestra primera bibliotecaria en el sistema de la Biblioteca Pública de Nueva York se destacó como escritora de cuentos para niños y por sus actividades en la comunidad puertorriqueña. La colección no está disponible para uso público, pero esperamos procesarla en un futuro inmediato.

IN PRINT

CENTRO PUBLICATIONS

HISTORY AND MIGRATION TASK FORCE

1986	*Industry and Idleness.* Frank Bonilla and Ricardo Campos.	$7.00
1984	*La Manigua en París: Correspondencia Diplomática de Betances.* Edited by: Félix Ojeda Reyes. Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, San Juan, P.R. y el Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, CUNY.	6.00
1983	*Sources for the Study of Puerto Rican Migration, 1879–1930.*	10.00

CULTURE AND THE ARTS TASK FORCE

1987	*Divided Arrival: Narratives of the Puerto Rican Migration, 1920–1950.* Bilingual Edition. Edited by: Juan Flores.	5.00
1984	*Memoirs of Bernardo Vega. A contribution to the History of the Puerto Rican Community in New York.* Edited by: César Andreu Iglesias. Translated by: Juan Flores. *Monthly Review Press.* 1984.	8.00
1982	*A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches.* Jesús Colón. International Publishers. Foreword by: Juan Flores.	3.75

ORAL HISTORY TASK FORCE

1988	*Aprender a luchar, luchar es aprender.* Literacy reader. Spanish only. (with Language Policy Task Force)	7.00
1987	Stories to Live By: Continuity and Change in Three Generations of Puerto Rican Women. Rina Benmayor, Ana Juarbe, Celia Alvarez and Blanca Vázquez.	5.00
1986	Extended Roots: From Hawaii to New York, *Migraciones Puertorriqueñas a los Estados Unidos.*	5.00

HIGHER EDUCATION TASK FORCE

1986	Education and Imperialism: The Puerto Rican Experience in Higher Education, 1898–1986. Carlos Rodríguez-Fraticelli.	5.00

LANGUAGE POLICY TASK FORCE

1988	Intergenerational Perspectives on Bilingualism: From Community to Classroom. 2nd Edition. John Attinasi, Pedro Pedraza, Jr., Shana Poplack and Alicia Pousada. *and* Speech and Ways of Speaking in a Bilingual Puerto Rican Community. Celia Alvarez, Adrian Bennett, Mel Greenlee, Pedro Pedraza, Jr. and Alicia Pousada. Sold individually for 10.00/2 volume set	17.00
1987	An Ethnographic Analysis of Language Use in the Puerto Rican Community of East Harlem. Working Paper # 12. Pedro Pedraza, Jr.	5.00
	Puerto Rican Community Participation in East Harlem Bilingual Programs. Working Paper #11. Alicia Pousada.	5.00
1981	A Comparative Study of Gender Assignment to Borrowed Nouns. Working Paper #10. Shana Poplack and Alicia Pousada.	3.00

LIBRARY

1987 *Ensayos y bibliografías puertorriqueñas: Serie/*
Puerto Rican Essays and Bibliographies: Series
*Boricuas en el Norte/*Julia de Burgos/ Luisa Capetillo/
Pedro Albizu Campos/René Marqués/Juan Antonio Corretjer
$1.00 each or $5.00 set

FILM AND VIDEO TASK FORCE

1986 *Manos a la Obra: The Story Behind Operation Bootstrap, A Study Guide Companion to the Documentary Film, "Manos a la Obra: The Story of Operation Bootstrap."* Pedro Angel Rivera. 7.00

IN ADDITION

1986 "Puerto Rican Studies: Promptings for the Academy and the Left."
Frank Bonilla, Ricardo Campos and Juan Flores in *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses.* 14.00

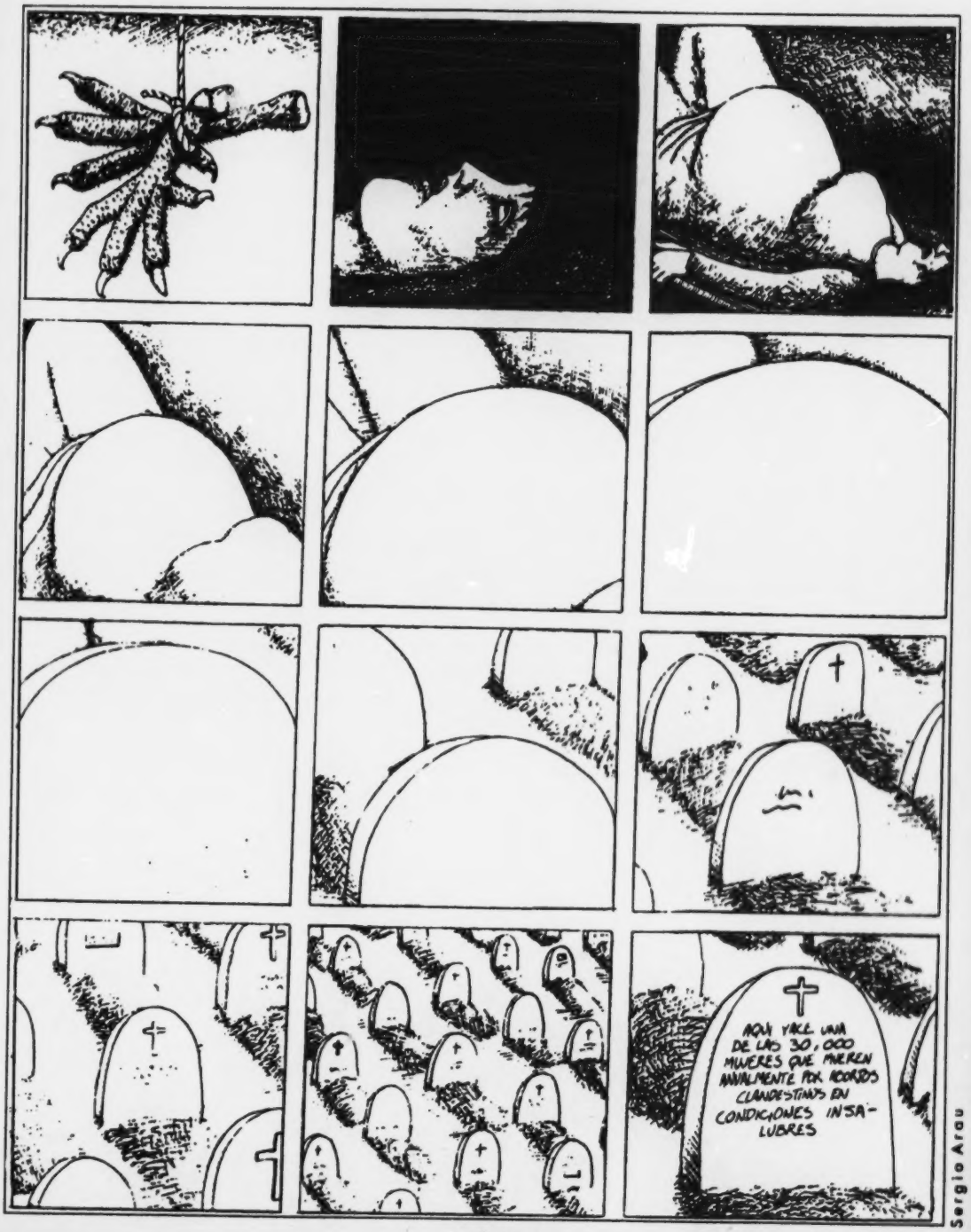
1982 Toward a Language Policy for Puerto Ricans in the United States:
An Agenda for a Community in Movement.
National Puerto Rican Task Force on Education Policy.
Bilingual Edition. 3.00

1976 *Worker's Struggle in Puerto Rico.* Angel Quintero Rivera. 6.00

DOCUMENTARIES

Nosotras trabajamos en la costura:
Puerto Rican Women in the Garment Industry.
15 minute slide show, available in English or Spanish.
The story of grandmothers, mothers and daughters and their experience in the needlework and garment industries in Puerto Rico and New York. With narration, music and oral histories. Oral History Task Force. Sliding scale rental

Nosotras trabajamos en la costura.
30 minute radio documentary about Puerto Rican women in the garment industry, available in English or Spanish. With narration, music and oral histories. Produced by Rina Benmayor, Blanca Vázquez, Ana Juarbe and Kimberly Safford. 10.00 one language, 15.00 bilingual edition


AQUÍ YACE UNA DE LAS 30,000 MUJERES QUE MUEREN ANUALMENTE POR ABORTOS CLANDESTINOS EN CONDICIONES INSALUBRES
Sergio Arau

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